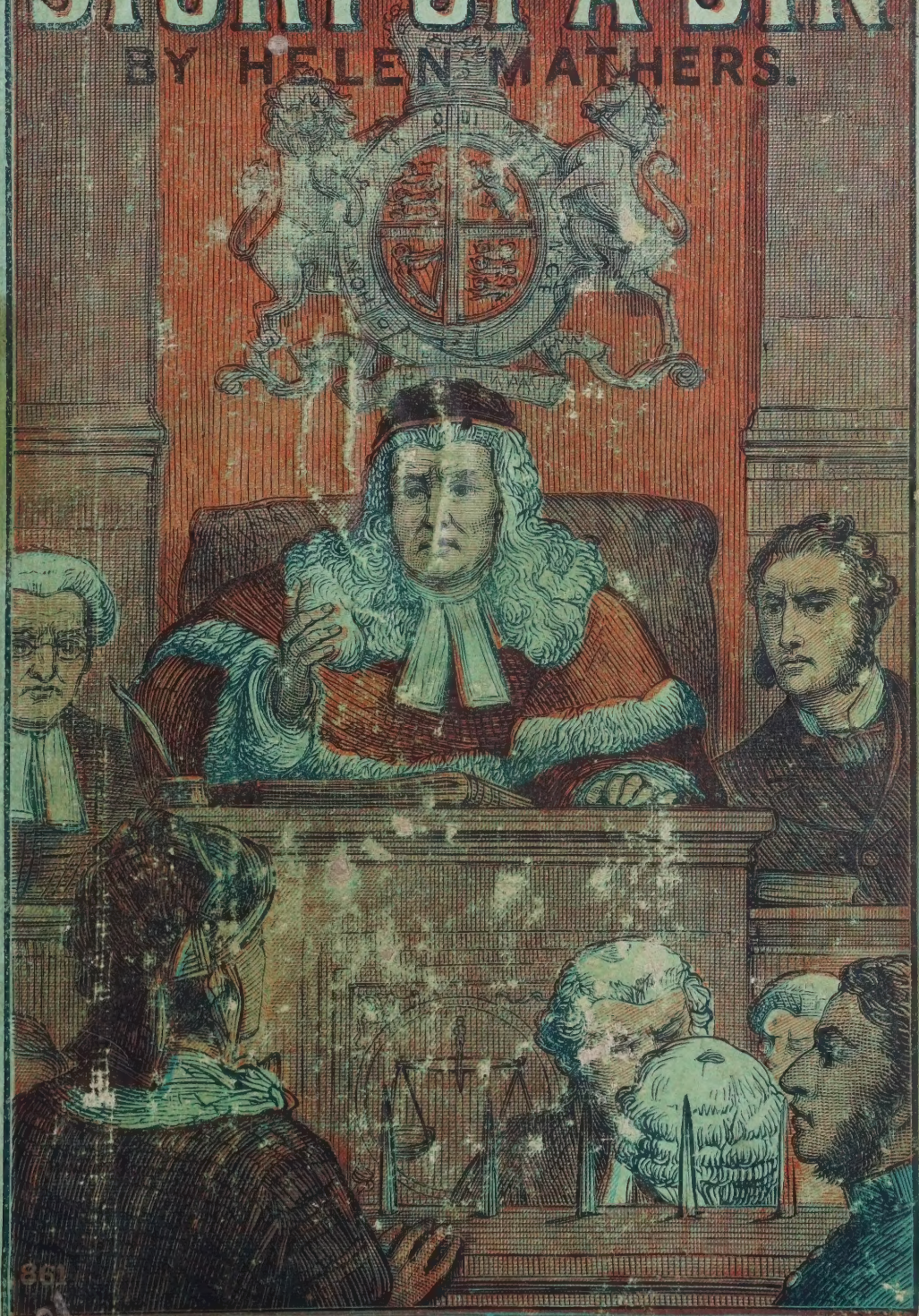
STORY OF A SIN

BY HELEN MATHERS.



GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS.

RB77336

Library
of the
University of Toronto

Fcap. 8vo ... printed cloth boards, One S...

Angling an... *Blakey.*

Pigeons and ... r Aquarium, *Delamer*, ... *Wood, M.A.* H. Weir. ... *Rev. J. G.*

Shooting, ... by *A. Meikle.* tions by H... Pigeon: Its

The Sheep ... ment, and and Trea... g, by *W.B. Martin*, I...

Flax and ... lion. ture and ... *A. Meikle.*

Delamer, plates.

Poultry Yard, by *E. Watts*, illustrated by H. Weir.

The Horse, by *Cecil*, illustrated by Wells.

Bees: Their Habits and Management, by *Rev. J. G. Wood.*

Cage and Singing Birds, by *H. G. Adams.*

Small Farms, and How they ought to be Managed, by *M. Doyle.*

Kitchen Garden, by *E. S. Delamer.*

Flower Garden, by ditto.

Farmer's Manual of Live Stock.

Field and Garden Plants.

Common Objects of the Sea-Shore.

Common Objects of the Country.

Woodlands, Heaths, and Hedges, by *W. S. Coleman.*

British Ferns, by *Thomas Moore, F.L.S.*, bds., with Coloured Plates.

Favourite Flowers.

British Birds' Eggs and Nests, by the *Rev. J. C. Atkinson.*

The Pig: How to Choose, Breed, Rear, Keep, and Cure, by *Samuel Sidney.*

British Butterflies, by *Coleman.*

Fly Fishing, by *H. C. Pennell.*

Bottom Fishing, by *H. C. Pennell.*

Trolling, by *H. C. Pennell.*

Domestic Cat, by *Dr. Gordon Stables.*

Rinks and Rollers, a Guide to the Skating Rink.

The Canary, by *J. G. Barnesby.*

Plate-Swimming, by *R. H. Dunlop, C.B.*

The Colorado Beetle.

Lawn Tennis, by *Jasper Smythe.*

Roses and How to Grow Them, with Illustrations.

1s. 6d. each.

Cattle: Their History and various Breeds, Management, Treatment, and Diseases, by *W. C. L. Martin*, revised by *W. & H. Raynbird.*

Dogs: Their Management in Health and Disease, by *Edward Mayhew, M.R.C.V.S.*, with Illustrations.

2s. each.

The Rat, with Anecdotes, by *Uncle James.*

Wild Flowers: Where to Find and How to Know them, by *Spencer Thomson*, illustrated.

Rarey on Horse Taming.

BOOKS FOR THE COUNTRY, *continued.*

Haunts of the Wild Flowers, by *Anne Pratt.*
Agricultural Chemistry, by *Alfred Sibson, F.C.S.*
Our Native Song Birds, by *Barnesby.*
Walton and Cotton's Angler, with additions by *Ephemera.*
Our Farm of Four Acres.
The Stud Farm, by *Cecil.*
Mr. Mechi's How to Farm Profitably. 2nd series, fcap. 8vo.
——— 3rd series.
Calendar of the Months, by *Rev. J. G. Wood, M.A.*

BOOKS FOR THE COUNTRY, FINE EDITION.

Printed on superior paper, with the Plates printed in Colours, except where marked *, fcap. 8vo, bevelled boards, gilt edges, 3s. 6d. each.

Wood's Common Objects of the Sea-Shore.
Wood's Common Objects of the Country.
Our Woodlands, Heaths, and Hedges.
Moore's British Ferns and Allied Plants.
Coleman's British Butterflies, 200 figures.
Atkinson's British Birds' Eggs and Nests.
Thomson's (Spencer) Wild Flowers.
Wood's (Rev. J. G.) Common Objects of the Microscope.
Anne Pratt's Haunts of Wild Flowers.
Delamer's Kitchen and Flower Garden.
Wood's (Rev. J. G.) Fresh and Salt-Water Aquarium.
Wood's (Rev. J. G.) Common British Moths.
Wood's (Rev. J. G.) Common British Beetles.
*Bechstein's Chamber and Cage Birds.
*Calendar of the Months, by the *Rev. J. G. Wood.*
*Walton and Cotton's Angler.
Roses: A Handbook of How, When, and Where to Purchase, Propagate, and Plant Them, with 8 pages Coloured Illustrations.
Gardening at a Glance, by *George Glenny*, with many Illustrations and Coloured Plates.

* These have plain woodcuts.

RECITERS AND READINGS.

In fancy covers, price 1s. each. (Postage 2*d.*)

Carpenter's Comic Reciter.
——— Popular Reciter.
Routledge's Comic Readings.
——— Popular Readings.
Routledge's Dramatic Readings.
———Temperance Reciter.
Ready-made Speeches.

RUBY SERIES. 1*s.*, 1*s.* 6*d.*, and 2*s.*

A Collection of Stories mostly of a Religious character, comprising Works of Miss WETHERELL, Rev. J. H. INGRAHAM, Miss CUMMINS, Mrs. STOWE, and others. *See Catalogue of Religious Books.*

EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY.

In fancy covers, **1s.** each; cloth gilt, **1s. 6d.**; cloth, gilt edges, **2s.**

English at the North Pole, by *Jules Verne*, with 6 plates.
Wild Man of the West, by *R. M. Ballantyne.*
Louis' School Days, by *E. J. May.*
Digby Heathcote, by *W. H. G. Kingston.*
Dick Rodney, by *James Grant.*
Boy Voyagers, by *Anne Bowman.*
Field of Ice, by *Jules Verne*, with 6 page plates.
Five Weeks in a Balloon, by *Jules Verne.*
A Journey to the Centre of the Earth, by *Jules Verne.*
20,000 Leagues under the Sea, by *Jules Verne*, 2 vols.
Ernie Elton, the Lazy Boy, by *Mrs. Eiloart.*
Ernie Elton at School, by *Mrs. Eiloart.*
The Midshipman.
Robert and Harold; or, The Young Marooners.
Holiday Camp, by *St. John Corbet.*
Voyage Round the World—South America, by *Jules Verne.*
—— Australia, by *Jules Verne.*
—— New Zealand, by *Verne.*
Robinson Crusoe.
A Floating City, and the Blockade Runners, by *Jules Verne.*
Swiss Family Robinson.
From the Earth to the Moon and Round the Moon, by *Jules Verne.*
Two Years Before the Mast.
Indian Boy, by *Rev. H. C. Adams.*
Young Gold Digger, by *Gerstaecker.*
Story of a Bad Boy, by *T. B. Aldrich.*
Three Englishmen and Three Russians, by *Jules Verne.*
Being a Boy, by *C. D. Warner.*
Archie Blake, by *Mrs. Eiloart.*
John Hartley; or, How we Got on in Life.
Joshua Hawsepipe, by *C. R. Low.*
Southey's Life of Nelson.
His Own Master, by *J. T. Trowbridge.*
Round the World in 80 Days, by *Jules Verne.*
Æsop's Fables, with 50 Illustrations by Weir.
The Fur Country, by *Jules Verne*, 2 vols.
Cousin Aleck; or, Boy Life among the Indians.
The Lost Rifle, by the *Rev. H. C. Adams.*

POPULAR LAW BOOKS, 1*s.* each (2*d.* postage).

Landlord and Tenant—Useful Forms — Glossary of Law Terms—New Stamp Act.
Wills, Executors and Administrators, with Useful Forms.
Master and Servant.
The Education Act, revised to 1873.
The Ballot Act.
Bills, Cheques, and I. O. U.s.
Friendly Societies' Act, 1875.

Helen Buckingham Mathers (1852-) was born at Cheltenham. She is now Mrs Henry Reeves. She edited the Burlington, a monthly magazine. This novel appeared in 1881.

STORY OF A SIN.

RAILWAY LIBRARY.

New volumes, 2s. each, fancy boards.

BLACK ABBEY. By M. Crommelin.

VIOLET JERMYN. By James Grant.

MADGE DUNRAVEN. By the Author of 'The Queen of Connaught.'

THE 'SCOTS BRIGADE.' By James Grant.

THE ROLL OF THE DRUM. By R. Mounteney Jephson.

THE CAMERONIANS. By James Grant.

STORY OF A SIN

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'COMIN' THRO' THE RYE'

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL
NEW YORK; 9, LAFAYETTE PLACE
1882

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026 with funding from
University of Toronto

https://archive.org/details/storyofsin00math

STORY OF A SIN.

BOOK I.—SOWN.

CHAPTER I.

'Angel of the Sin,
Such as thou standest—pale in the drear light—
Which rounds the rebel's work with Maker's wrath.'

'MARTHA MISTAKE, you are found guilty by your own confession, and on the clearest possible evidence, of the murder of an infant, name unknown, in the Shifting Pool, in the village of Lovel, five and a half years ago; and though the recommendation to mercy will be forwarded in due course, I can hold out no hope that the sentence I am about to pass on you will be commuted.' And the judge proceeded to pass sentence of death in the usual way.

Sordid and inexpressibly mean in the faint light of dawn looked the court in which these words were spoken; the sentence itself seemed too fine a thing for the wretch who received it, her lips parting

in an audible 'Thank God!' as the judge ceased to speak, and, jerking aside the black cap, threw his scarlet robes about him, and instantly left the court.

A clamour of tongues broke out on his departure, and a trampling of feet set in towards the one narrow exit; not a glance of curiosity, not a word of pity, was flung towards the prisoner in the dock; every emotion usual to the occasion seemed to be in abeyance, as jurymen and spectators and officials hurried to quit the place, where for so many weary hours they had been incarcerated.

One person alone kept his place—a man in the prime of manhood and full intellectual vigour, who throughout the trial had sat by the judge's side, keenly watching the progress of the case, and still kept his gaze fixed on the prisoner, who, in the very act of removal, had thrust aside the gaoler's arm to look back and return that curiously intent gaze.

For a minute she hesitated, plunging in his eyes a strange look, to which he had no clue; her lips moved, she made a half-gesture as though to beckon him, then turned and left the dock with a firm step.

'One of those retarded intelligences that think much and speak little; that combine the simplicity of thought with the directness in execution of a savage or a child . . . . unloved, as a virgin she has been able to bring the whole forces of her nature to a difficult undertaking, and so far has—succeeded.'

So thinking, he rose and made his way to the Assize Inn, where he found the judge already retired to bed, his wig suspended above him on the bed-post.

'Is that you, Eyre?' he said, opening his eyes. 'I wish I could have hanged those twelve fools as well as the woman. Nine hours' deliberation and a recommendation to mercy, on the face of such a summing-up as mine! You'll turn in now, of course?'

'No; my horse is waiting. I'm bound for home.'

The judge made a wry face.

'So you're still—still——I wonder what it's like?' he added, as one thinking aloud.

'Try it,' said Mr. Eyre, with a smile.

The old bachelor shook his head.

'Women,' he said, 'are—are——' but the remainder of his sentence was cut short by a snore.

'And now for Madcap,' said Mr. Eyre, as he sprang into his saddle—'Madcap, sunshine of my breast.' But even as he spoke the governor of the gaol hurried out and begged of him to defer his departure for five minutes, as the condemned woman had been asking eagerly to see him.

'She has been so inveterately silent,' he said, as Mr. Eyre dismounted, 'that I feared if this opportunity of hearing the truth were missed, another might not occur, and so ventured to detain you.'

'Oh, she won't confess,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly. 'I have been studying her; she fears only lest her

crime be discovered to the parents, who are guiltless in the business, or I'm much mistaken.'

'If the summing-up had not been so clear,' said the governor, 'she would have got off; as it is, that recommendation to mercy may save her neck yet.'

'Not it,' said Mr. Eyre; 'I shall send a private line to town—guilty she is, and hanged she shall be.'

These words—for the cell-door was at that moment thrown open—were heard by the prisoner.

'Shall I?' she said, lifting her head from her knees, and fixing on him a strange look as he entered.

'Ay,' he said; 'your crime was an inhuman one, and your life pays the forfeit.'

'If all were known,' she said, 'I should no more die on the gallows than you.'

'Then tell all,' said Mr. Eyre instantly. 'Reveal the facts that prove your innocence—denounce the guilty and let the parents be brought forward! Ay,' he added, pursuing her rising terror, 'and they *shall* be, if they are living.'

'They're dead,' she said, in uncontrollable agitation, 'and I did it—I laid the baby down by the pool, and it was drowned; and I pleaded guilty—you can't alter *that;* and if you tell anybody I said there's others behind me, I'll say that you lied, for all that you're a great gentleman, and a magistrate, and I'm a poor serving woman that——'

'So it was your mistress's child that you drowned,'

he said, following each thought as it painted itself on her face.

'Who said it?' she cried, starting back as if a bullet had struck her. 'If any come here after I'm dead, tell them—tell them—I thought I'd a sort of claim on you,' she went on sullenly, 'because 'twas you that gave me up to justice and put the rope round my neck; and because there's that in your face as has seemed nat'ral to me all through, and puzzles me yet; but I'm sorry now I sent to beg a word with you.'

Her arms fell to her sides. The narrow mean face suddenly became fixed and sharpened to an intensity of expression that almost reached power; still thinking intently, her right hand stole to her throat and gripped it, while a faint smile crossed the intensity of her gaze, as one who in secret nourishes a pleasant thought.

'When's my hanging?' she said abruptly.

'Saturday.'

'Those fools recommended me to mercy,' she said slowly; 'I want you to look to it, that none of that rubbish comes between this and Saturday.'

'Nothing will; it's fixed as fate.'

'Four days,' she said, thinking hard; 'lots might happen in four days. You're a magistrate,' she added suddenly; 'couldn't you give orders that nobody's to be let come and see me before I die, not if they begged ever so? and if I die between this and Saturday—for

folks sometimes die as quick at home as on the gallows—couldn't you make them bury me quick, so as them that come mightn't be able to take a look at me?'

Mr. Eyre glanced round at the tall narrow grating, the straw pallet, the wooden bowl and spoon—no; there was no instrument of self-destruction here—not even a beam whence she might simulate that awful leap in the dark which in all human probability awaited her.

'And so you would commit a second crime rather than face some unknown person — probably the mother,' he said, looking at her fixedly.

'No, no!' she almost screamed; 'if anybody came after I'm dead it couldn't be the mother . . . tell her that 'twas my own child I drowned in the pool . . . you'll have more on your soul than you know of if you tell her any different. . . . I'm mad,' she muttered, 'to tell you this, and maybe you'll tell *her*, and I'll have died for nothing, and *she'll* live on believing what's worse than the truth.'

'You did not hate this woman,' said Mr. Eyre, still watching her, 'yet you killed her child; what, then, was your motive for the deed?'

'Love,' she said. 'I'd have given my heart's blood for her, as I'd have lost my soul to punish *him*.' Her eyes had the fixity of a tiger's, her body the spring and crouch of one, as she looked straight before her, seeming to see what to Mr. Eyre was invisible.

'So it is the old story,' he said. 'And you, poor wretch, thinking to revenge yourself on him, have only called down punishment on what you loved. But what brought you to Lovel?' he added suddenly.

'I got a clue,' she said, 'but 'twas a false one. It's been a black, bitter mistake (like my name) from the beginning.'

'You came here in search of the father?' said Mr. Eyre.

'I'll tell you no more,' she said doggedly; 'and though there's one or two questions I'd like to ask you, I won't do it. I'll leave nothing behind as *she* could know me by, if she came after I was gone. I'll be just a nameless woman as neither she nor you could be sure was her as she was looking for.'

'Your conviction will to-morrow be in every paper,' he said, 'and draw momentary attention to your crime. Your absence from her, too, may have excited her suspicions. In all human probability you will see her before you die.'

'To-morrow,' she said, below her breath. 'Ay, but *to-day's* mine.'

'Not so,' said Mr. Eyre rising; 'for since your intention is known, means will be taken to defeat it. You will be closely watched, and the escape you meditate rendered impossible.'

'You're a hard man,' she said, looking up. 'Have you got a wife, or a child, or any that may want pity

shown to them some day? I'm thinking they'll get hard measure if they're judged by the mercy you've shown to others; and though you're high, God-a-mercy's higher. Perhaps *He'll* call me afore I'm fetched on Saturday.'

'Miracles are rare in these days,' he said, as he struck the door with his whip. Then added, as the turnkey hurried to unlock it, 'You have nothing more to say?'

'No; that's all,' she replied bitterly. 'One ruined life, two broken hearts, a murder, a hanging—that's all; and enough, too, for one man's holiday work!'

'And who is the man?' he said, pausing on the threshold of the now open door; but the woman had sunk into a sullen silence, her face shrouded on her knees.

'She has confessed nothing but what we knew or guessed before,' said Mr. Eyre to the chaplain, who was waiting without; 'but a watch must be placed in her cell, and relieved night and day till the end. Should a stranger come to see her, send for me immediately.'

'Colonel Busby is interesting himself about a memorial,' said the governor, as they crossed the courtyard, 'and talks of himself taking it to town.'

'Pooh!' said Mr. Eyre; 'he'd better stay at home. Though if he goes he'll take no harm; "no creature smarts so little as a fool."'

'Here he is,' said the governor, repressing a smile, as at that moment a short, pursy man rushed through the gates and unfurled a scroll on which a considerable number of names were inscribed.

'We want your signature, Eyre,' he said breathlessly. 'You see I began betimes, knowing the verdict was a foregone conclusion. But with the recommendation to mercy to back it, I flatter myself that *this* will put a different face upon matters.'

'On what ground do you base your application?' said Mr. Eyre quietly. 'The woman pleaded guilty. If she did not actually drown the child, she deliberately abandoned it to its death; the crime's all one in the eyes of the law.'

'But the length of time that has elapsed,' said Colonel Busby, 'the certainty that there are others in the background as guilty as herself, probably in this very neighbourhood.' His sidelong look fell before Mr. Eyre's glance, as the latter said:

'You will not count on me. Indeed, I'm about to send a private line to town, pointing out the facts of the case, and how the gross ignorance and stupidity of the jury is responsible for the error of justice contained in a recommendation to mercy.'

Colonel Busby turned pale. Mr. Eyre's influence in high quarters was well known, and did he choose to exercise it, the memorial, though vouched by every signature of note in the country, was so much

waste-paper. With a brief good-morrow to the two gentlemen, for dawn was now giving place to day, Mr. Eyre mounted his horse and rode off at a good pace, pausing, however, on the outskirts of the town to burst out laughing, as at a sudden recollection.

'How true,' he said aloud—'how true that "with stupidity and a good digestion we may front much."'

CHAPTER II.

'Twixt dew and bird
So sweet a silence ministered,
God seemed to use it for a word.'

BETWEEN the darkness of night and the brightness of morning, there is in spring and time of full summer a space that surely outweighs, in its peace and beauty, all the hours that have gone before or will come after.

It is that in which Nature still slumbers, yet trembles each moment towards awakening—when no quiver of leaf, nor cry of bird, nor footfall of her lightest creature, breaks the intense stillness—when, in the hushed pause between earth and heaven, man involuntarily hearkens for the voice of God, but finds it not; then, looking upward and descrying that Presence made manifest—

In light instead of sound.'

draws as nigh into his Creator as human being may.

Nothing moves but the dawn, whose outgoing breath is that wan pellucid blue that overruns the heavens—whose footsteps fall in hyacinth and gold on the edge of the sky, and who climbs with a measureless calm, a grand austerity that ofttimes lifts to its own peace the soul of him who lonely worships from below.

So will you see the skylark, as though caught out of herself by this moment so solemnly sweet, so divinely still, break suddenly away from earth, and springing sheer up to Heaven's gate, pour her exalted song in at it—then, that throbbing rapture over, sink heavily to earth, the music in her quenched for sorrow that she must return to the haunts of men, nor make her home in that cold, pure splendour which for a moment her eager heart and wing have touched. That magic voice breaks the charm: slowly above the horizon shows the blood-red disc of the sun, whose beams, arrow-straight, pierce to the very heart of Nature—and lo! there is life in the air, there is colour in the landscape; like a choir led by an invisible hand uprise the million subtle sounds and scents of the morning .... day has come, and with it unrest, joy, sorrow .... and we look to the fading jasper in yon far-off sky with a dim mysterious pain stirring at the heart, and the pæans of praise around us ring in our ears like rude echoes of the worship

that but now lay like an unuttered word 'twixt God and the soul of His creatures.

At such a moment Mr. Eyre, checking his horse on the brow of a hill that overlooked his home, sent his glance in search of the rugged pile that crouched at the foot of the rock whence it sprung, its summit clothed with gorse that at sunset flung a blood-red banner above the ancient house, so that far and wide it was known as the Red Hall. But in the smile of the morning one thought less of the grim battlements than of the little flowers that crept between, and peeped over to those brighter sisters below, that bloomed in the old courtyard that had once trembled to the thunder of a thousand feet; and even as Mr. Eyre gazed, there floated up to him a sound—the most joyous note surely in the whole gamut of earthly sound, so pure, so silvery—the laughter of a very young child. It came as sudden, as clear, as dropped notes of the skylark's song—a moment, and something flitted across the open—

> 'Moving light, as all young things,
> As young birds and early wheat,
> When the wind blows over it'—

something that pattered barefooted over the stones as unconcernedly as rose-leaves sinking on moss; that held a nightgown up in one dimpled hand, and chuckled wisely to itself as it went, never pausing till the garden was reached, where its tiny feet left a

print as of fairies' footsteps all along the silvered grass.

Business was clearly in its mind, but, to a truant of three or thereabouts, there are fifty things abroad at this hour of the morning calculated to make him forget why he got up thus early; and it was not long before he fell in with a lame blackbird, before whom he went down on his hands and knees, the two exchanging confidences without a trace of shyness on either side; and then there was a squirrel to be assisted in the fascinating duty of washing her face, and a bird's-nest to be peeped into—though, to be sure, he was soon scared away from that by the fierce, wistful eyes of the mother-bird; and two field-mice to be put back into a hole: and altogether he wasted much valuable time, and brought down on his own head the fate that presently overtook him.

He was just trying to coax a butterfly to perch on his forefinger, when a slight sound in the distance made his heart sink like lead to where his shoes ought to have been. He set off running in the direction of a certain rose-bush, but too late; the next moment something flashed past him, and the coveted flower for which he had risen so early was snatched from him by his pursuer's hand.

'And me got up *to* yerly,' said Dody, too dejected even to hold his nightgown up, as he approached his brother. 'Me opied the door all alone, and everythink!'

'You couldn't expect to beat *me*, you know, Dody,' said Doune, with some contempt; 'and it's a pity you can't dress yourself—*I* can.'

'You is not dressed proper,' objected Dody; 'your strings is hanging out.'

'O! that's nothing; Josephine often does that when she's in a hurry. I say, Dody, I know something that *you* don't.'

'Iss,' said Dody, too humiliated by his recent failure to hazard even a guess at the secret.

'Now what would you say to going cowsliping this morning with mother?'

Dody clasped his hands in momentary ecstasy, then his face fell.

'Daddy won't let us,' he said gravely; 'we've never been cowsiping wiz mummy all our lives—not never.'

'All our lives!' said Doune, with immense contempt; 'why, you're only four; I'm five, and I went cowsliping when you were a baby, eating pap and all that.'

'You was a baby once,' said Dody, with dignity; 'so was daddy. Wonder if anybody ever 'macked daddy, eh, Doony?'

'Nobody 'ud dare,' said Doune; 'he punishes everybody. I heard Josephine tell Molly last night he was away punishing a poor woman, and that's why we're going to have a treat.'

'Poor 'ooman!' said Dody, shaking his head with

much concern; 'rather not go cowsiping than hurt her, Doony. Wonder if he whipped her very hard?'

'Oh! he doesn't whip her,' said Doune. 'I don't quite understand what he does, but he won't be back till breakfast-time.'

'Oh my!' said Dody, hugging himself all up together with delight; 'does 'oo think mummy 'll wake up soon, Doony?'

'She'll have her cup of tea at seven, you know, and——'

'*Us* 'll take it to her,' cried Dody, shouting with joy, as he set off running towards the house, his thoughts flying in and out of a thousand golden bells that for him were nodding out yonder, while his heart sped before to the mother without whom cowsliping was no joy.

She heard that happy laughter in her sleep, and, waking, looked through her window, and saw the little brothers crossing the courtyard, so that when they came down the gallery on tiptoe there was a wild cry of 'Mother! mother!' a rush forward, and then two fond arms closed upon the pair, and heaven was in that narrow compass; and, even to Dody, earth, with its store of cowslips, was forgot.

Then, as you will see a young apple-tree overborne by the weight of its first-fruits bend proudly to earth, content rather to break than to forego them, so sank this young mother with her treasures to the ground,

where they clung about and kissed her as though they could no more be a-weary of her lips than she of theirs, till, out of breath, they kissed no more, but squeezed her to them with all their little tender might —the truest, fondest pair of lovers woman ever had yet.

And to such lovers as these she never grows old, nor waxes their love chill; twenty years hence, whether here or with God, she will be as dear, as beautiful in their eyes as now, while far away (whether here or beyond) in the innermost recesses of her heart, she will cradle them warm, the tiny creatures whose tender feet had neither will nor strength to stray farther from her side than her voice had power to win them back.

'Happy a year, mummy!' said Dody, patting her face with a little velvet hand; 'it's your burfday, but I've got *noting* for you,' he added, his voice rising as his heart swelled.

'He means many happy returns of the day,' said Doune, presenting the rose and struggling out of his mother's arms; 'but he's so very little, you really must excuse him.'

'Thank you, my sweethearts,' she said, and her voice might have painted her to a blind man as she stood, Dody's pink toes curled like rose-leaves at her waist, and on her young face such a glow as makes the mother yet

'The holiest thing alive,'

'But these cold wet feet,' she added, feeling them anxiously, 'and this dripping nightgown'—and she shivered as though a blast of death had struck her, as she wrapped her arms about him. Dody clung to her in almost as much fear as love when she carried him over the threshold he was so rarely privileged to cross; but when he found himself warmly wrapped in her elbow-chair, and she on her knees before him warming his cold feet at her breast, while against his little limbs she laid her head in the old, old worship that requires no teaching, he resigned himself to circumstances with all the unconscious grace and dignity of childhood.

'You is a *sweet* little mummy,' he said, framing her chestnut head in his hands, adding, as one struck by a sudden recollection, 'would 'oo like to hear me say my pairs? me knows such pitty worses, and 'oo's *never* heard me say them—not never!'

'Say them to me now,' whispered Mrs. Eyre, hiding her face in his neck that he might not see the colour that overspread it . . . . not for her had been the joy of folding these little hands in prayer, as rarely, indeed, had she stood by her children to bless them as they slept; her husband's love overshadowed all her life, and demanded of her an undivided allegiance in which her motherhood found no place.

'Oh, mummy!' he cried, his eyes wandering over her head to the open window beyond; 'me quite forgot—us is going cowsiping wiz 'oo; lots of time for pairs bimeby!'

'No, no,' she said, the red of her cheek pressed to the warm white of his neck, 'I want to hear them. . . . .'

Perhaps the man who believes in nothing receives no greater shock to his unbelief than when he hears his child lisping out at its mother's knee :

> 'Pity my simplicity,
> Teach me how to come to Thee . . . . .'

He would be less than human could he detach those little folded hands, cloud with doubt that innocent mind . . . . as he listens he must surely put himself in the child's place, and, for one brief moment, *believe.*

'And peese Gawd, don't send daddy 'ome till we'se bin cowsiping, 'cos cowsips is nearly over, Amen,' concluded Dody ; adding in the same breath, 'Oh, look at that little boy in your eyes !'

'Is 'oo going to ky?' he said, in wonder. Then, spying a brown mole on her beautiful neck, and thinking that it was something that hurt her, he leaned forward and pressed with devout faith his tender lips to it, 'to make it well,' as she had now and again done for him in his childish aches and bruises, and for want of which he had so often cried himself to sleep.

'Madcap!' said a stern voice behind them ; and they turned aghast to see the master of the house looking with a frown of strong disapproval at the group.

'Off with you !' he said, glancing from one child to the other, for Doune had just reappeared, bearing his

brother's clothes; but the one stood motionless, his brows drawn into an absurd reproduction of his father's frown, while Dody, made desperate by vanishing joys, actually dared to nod his smal head gravely at his father, and remark:

'Us is going cowsiping wiz mummy!'

'Next year, perhaps,' said Mr. Eyre drily, and pointed to the door with a gesture that neither child dared resist; they ran to each other, and not daring even to pause and kiss their mother, clasped hands and trotted down the corridor, sobbing bitterly as they went.

'Good morning, ma'am!' said Mr. Eyre, with trenchant emphasis, as the sound of those little footsteps died away, and still Madcap had not advanced a step to greet him.

'Good morning, sir!' she replied, wiping a tear away with equal spirit.

'And pray,' said he, 'is that tear due to my absence or my return?'

'To neither,' she said, sitting down by the open window, and looking up at the pale sky as if she sought and found her children's faces there.

'So that's over,' said Mr. Eyre, as he loosened his riding-cloak and threw it aside.

'What is?' said Madcap, looking round.

'No more than I can make shift to live without,' he said, as he sat down at some distance, and stooped to unfasten his spurs.

'What could that have been?' said Madcap, the mother in her eyes dwindling to two specks as she insensibly approached him.

'Only a sweetheart; not much when you get a besotted mother in her place; and then for the husband to object to be sunk in the father of a fine family—what folly!' And Mr. Eyre detached a spur with a vigour worthy of the thought.

'It is a beautiful character—a father!' said Madcap, shaking her head gravely; 'but somehow—somehow you don't seem to fit it!'

'Not I,' he said grimly; 'such folly is for mothers, not men.'

'Yes,' she said, sitting down opposite him; a young light shape, with bare arms crossed lightly on its knees, and upon brow and lips something lovelier far than the childish dimpled beauty so dear to lover's heart; 'for mothers like me. Have you ever thought of it; that I must love them because .... because I am their mother?'

He turned and looked at her keenly, for the first time in his life consciously regarding her as the mother of those mere unconsidered trifles that he called his children.

As idolised sweetheart, wife, friend, as the little wild Madcap who, in electing to dance through life to the tune of his own sober footsteps, had come to him to—

'Fill all the stops of life with tuneful breath,'

he knew her well; but this motherhood—there was to him nothing lovely or sacred in it; on the contrary, a fierce pang smote him as he realised that his sole undivided right to her was gone, and that others had as great a claim upon her as himself.

He snatched her in his arms, as though by sheer force he would keep her still; then put her from him, and heavily, with the fires of love suddenly grown chill in his eyes, turned away.

'There—go!' he said. 'Forty years of my life I managed to live without you; the rest of my existence, as I told you but now, I'll eke out somehow.'

For a moment she shrank from him—from this selfish virile love that swept aside all, even duty, in its course; then, with an instant recoil of feeling, the woman's heart thrilled to the man's exacting devotion, and she approached him softly.

'Love has no second place,' she said; 'and *could* you live without me?' she added, all the mother gone, and the sweetheart's airs and graces in full blow.

'Indeed I could. It's living *with* you, and taking a second place, that I won't endure.'

'You might do worse,' said Madcap sadly, and uplifting to him two such sweet mirrors of fatherhood as a man might look in and find himself ennobled, not dethroned.

'And better,' he said. 'For instance, I might breakfast——' and he opened the door as he spoke.

His will carried him across the threshold; but flesh and blood is sometimes stronger than iron, and somehow Mr. Eyre found himself led back to a chair, while Madcap, in a mere accidental way, seated herself on his knee.

'And pray, ma'am,' said he coldly, 'what do you do here?'

'O! I'm used to it,' she said, nodding, as she clung to his coat lappel to save herself from slipping from the ungracious support afforded.

'Precisely,' he said. 'Mere habit—duty—what you will—not a spark of real inclination in it—a chair would do as well. Off with you, ma'am, to the nursery; there thread your daisy chains, weave your cowslip balls, and be happy.'

'And supposing I would rather stay here?' she said, twining an unwilling hand about her neck. 'Besides, you—you've forgotten something!'

'What's that?' he said, looking with cold and grudging eyes at the little mouth,

> 'Where the untired smile of youth
> Did light outward its own sighs;'

'to wish you more years in which to see me grow old? Your babies have done that. To kiss you? It was Madcap that I used to kiss—and she's gone; it's a body without a heart that perches so confidently on my knee.'

'Is it?' she said, suddenly clasping two round

young arms above his ebon head; 'then—then kiss me as a mother!'

For a moment he did not stir, only looking hard in her eyes, where bit by bit he saw himself as detested parent disappearing, and the lover growing, in his own proper form; then, as their hearts rushed together, their lips met in such a kiss as suspense had quickened into heaven.

'And you will love them a little—for my sake?' said Madcap wistfully, as he released her.

'No; you for theirs. And for me, Madcap—for me—

> '"Keep therefore a true woman's eye,
> And love me still, but know not why,
> So hast thou the same reason still
> To dote upon me ever."'

CHAPTER III.

> 'His certain life that never could deceive him,
> Is full of thousand sweets and rich content;
> The smooth-leav'd beeches in the field receive him
> With coolest shade till noontide's heat is spent.
> His life is neither toss'd in boisterous seas
> O'er the vexatious world, or lost in slothful ease;
> Pleas'd and full blest he lives, when he his God can please.'

TWO little faces—one tear-stained, the other proud and angry—at nine o'clock saw the horses led to the door, and Mr. Eyre came out leading his wife, who

was laughing at something he said, and somehow forgot to look up at the casement and kiss her hand to the children as she passed.

She remembered them too late, and then but for a moment; her husband filled memory and landscape alike, ruling her every thought, and carrying her back to those days when, deprived of his company, she had tried to live without him, and nearly died of the attempt. The momentary coldness of the morning had in its recoil drawn them but the closer, and something of that yearning sense of love being before, not behind them, rode with them as they went, and gave to the life around that subtle touch which brings the lowliest blade of grass equally with God's noblest handiwork into sympathy with the heart's content.

There are moments when memory quickens and becomes a living joy; when the mere hue of a flower seems to say, 'Do you remember?' and the note of the bird to cry, 'Have you forgotten?'—when a sound —a scent—is as a word spoken by one to another; when if your beloved be at your side, in fancy you clasp hands and go back together to the remote beloved past; and when—ah, God!—if you have lost him, but not by death, he comes to you living and real as the grass at your feet—your very own, as when together you plucked the flowers that look up at you with clear eyes that remember both you and him! Strange that the past should have such power over us, turning our present gold, as it were, to dross

—dimming the sunset hues that point to a bright to-morrow; reaching out to us from the darkness like a dear dead hand to hallow our living joys, as the good ship that lies at anchor casts far beyond her on the waters a silvery track of light that she herself shall never traverse.

Mr. Eyre's heart exulted in him as he bared his brow to the air, 'nimble and sweet,' and looked around—Madcap, honour, fame, riches; all these were his—and what lacked he? Life held not one joy that he coveted, or did not hold in the hollow of his hand, and through the gathering years he saw himself as now, for love is immortal, and Madcap was youth, and with the twain ever at his side he might defy age. He had never before counted up his treasures thus—whence, too, came this odd sense of power and mastery over fate that swayed him as though he were unused to sovereignty, and must take the braggart's loud pitiful pride in it?

Dear to him were those peaceful breathings that, ascending from the village below, spoke of duteous toil, followed in its turn by grateful rest. Not a sight or sound met eye or ear but spoke of happiness in the past, of sure coming peace in the future. Content was he to dwell among clods, so he might share the clods' noble portion of air, sky, and earth.

'A sweet without a snare—a pleasure that brings no pain—to sow and plant in hope, waiting in the rainbow promise that harvest shall never fail,' he said,

thinking half out of his own mind, and half from a well-loved book. 'And there are those who pity us, Madcap—who smile at this "rich attendance on our poverty," and who would beckon us out of our content to the feverish delights of the world—delights that would please you about as well as a jewel would in comparison with *this*.'

He turned aside to pluck a pale earth-star, lonely, belated, seeming to shrink within herself from the too vivid, voluptuous life around; for they were passing just then between hedgerows sparkling through spring showers—hedgerows upon whose banks the seasons met and clasped hands, the bright young beauties of a month ago standing bravely up in their faded smocks side by side with the bold, gay new-comers, about whose skirts the breath of early summer clung. And these wistful eyes, that seemed to say, 'Do not pass us by because we wear so shabby a mien, but gather us for the sake of the yesterday in which we and you were so happy, and that perhaps will have no morrow . . . .' drew Madcap's, so that it was a tiny knot indeed that at length she placed in her breast.

'And I love to see you so,' said Mr. Eyre, 'with a simple flower in your hand, and your hair with only its own light to view it by. After all, what is every ornament with which a foolish woman thinks to adorn herself but an imitation of those natural ones that adorn our birds?'

'And how much less beautiful!' said Madcap,

looking up to a gold-crested wren who sang at ease, swinging amidst the yellow tassels of the hazel; while, hard by, as if in mockery of the tiny creature's soulless splendour, a russet thrush poured out his song—the careful thrush who

> 'Sings each song twice over,
> Lest you should think he never could recapture
> The first fine careless rapture, . . .'

and whose song, when we are happy, is the song of our own hearts, and it is the bird who is hearkening, and we who are pouring out that triumphant, throbbing joy.

'What were you thinking, Madcap?' said Mr. Eyre, struck by something in her face.

'That if I were not happy, such a song as that would break my heart!'

She was trembling violently, and though he caught her in his arms, she trembled still, then sat erect, and passing her hand before her eyes, gazed around.

'What was it?' she said. 'Something—some one—and yet I saw only you—*alone*—hating all the beauty on which you looked because I was not beside you!'

'That's true enough,' said Mr. Eyre; 'not a twig, leaf, or blossom pleased me on my way home this morning; all I saw was Madcap at the end of my ride, and I found——'

'Something that could think of *you*, not them, if——'

'And so you are to die in spring, Madcap,' he said,

as he held her close, 'and, like Sir Thomas Overbury's milkmaid, have good store of flowers to cover you; well, you'll let me creep under the same coverlid, I hope—but no, not even for you will I submit to be made ridiculous. Two sculptured lovers weeping under a willow-tree never inspired me with anything but disgust; they ought not to have died—had they *willed* to live they must have done so.'

'But, before now, lovers have willed each other to die,' said Madcap dreamily; 'and all—for love!'

'No—for jealousy,' said Mr. Eyre; 'and what a man has reason to be jealous of, is not worth killing—he should equally scorn to harm, as to detain her.'

'And so you could not be jealous?' said Madcap, some of the old colour and mischief stealing back to her pale face.

'Not I! Do you mean to try me?'

'Look!' she said, as if in answer; and they turned on the brow of the hill, and together gazed down on the vast woods of Lovel spread out below—woods upon whose brown surface the young green had encroached little by little, like the sea upon a coast set thick with little islets and promontories, till at length, growing bold, it had overspread all, and now lay pulsing in the sunlight—a tide whose ebb and flow bore mysterious whisperings with it, rising at moments to a song more sweet and human than ever yet was reached by ocean's lullaby.

'It is like a bird's variations on the one note that

he has by heart, and expresses so perfectly,' said Madcap dreamily, her eyes fixed on that exquisite green.

'And do you wish him back?' said Mr. Eyre, looking keenly at his wife.

'Indeed I do!' she said, looking towards the distant turrets that rose greyly out of that shimmering light. 'Not a day passes but I think of him—poor Frank!'

'And do you think he has stayed away these six years on your account?'

'I don't know,' said Madcap, turning her head aside; 'only you see I was Frank's first, his *only* sweetheart!'

'And that is better than being a man's last,' said Mr. Eyre.

'And why not first *and* last?' said Madcap, that spark of faithfulness in her eyes which, once lit in a woman, from however unworthy a source, is quenched but with her breath. 'Might not two people love each other in youth, and *grow* to each other in middle age, till at length they toddled down the steep incline more in love than ever?'

'As you and Frank might have done?' said Mr. Eyre; 'and now I come to think of it, you seemed to love each other very much. That box on the ear, for instance——'

'He had been worrying me,' said Madcap, hanging her head, 'and so I got on the ladder to count the plums,'

'And ate six,' said Mr. Eyre. 'I reckoned them as I stood at the bottom.'

'You came three hours before you were expected,' said Madcap reproachfully; 'and who would have thought of your walking straight to the kitchen garden?'

'You came down backwards,' said Mr. Eyre, smiling at his recollections; 'such a young shape, and such a slim foot and ankle, I wished the descent had been twice as long: and half-way down you stopped, and said you would stay there till doomsday unless I promised not to try and kiss you.'

'And you promised,' said Madcap, jogged by memory into fiercer blushes than the actualities of life had caused her these five years. 'It sounded just like Frank's voice; but when I turned round and saw you—why had you got that look on your face?' she cried, stopping short to laugh. 'Of course I boxed your ears—who could help it?'

'And so my acquaintance with Frank's sweetheart began,' said Mr. Eyre, thinking of his friend.

'Why did I go?' he added, as one thinking aloud. 'I loved the boy, and I suppose loved you for his sake before ever I saw you.'

'But when did you begin loving me *for myself?*' said Madcap coaxingly.

'Let me see,' he said, 'was it when you tucked your skirts round your ankles and walked out of the room on your hands?'

'You had no business in the schoolroom, nor Frank either,' cried Madcap, ashamed. 'I had forbidden him to come there; and—and how do you know it was I, after all? No *one* could positively swear to another person's heels!'

'And, when next we met, you walked demurely and wore boots,' said Mr. Eyre gravely; 'yet I could have sworn to those shoes as the very same that I had seen twinkling down the ladder. No—I did not fall in love with you then.'

'But perhaps you had done it already?' said Madcap, saucy, though abashed.

'Perhaps,' he said; 'and you?'

'You were so old, so grave, so—so respectable,' said Madcap, looking away. 'Do you know, I was so amazed when I heard that you had the reputation of being—wicked.'

'Did Frank tell you that?'

'*Frank!* No; it was Lady Betty.'

'And what did you say?'

'That it must have been so long ago, I wondered people hadn't quite forgotten it!'

'Did I seem such an old fellow to you as that, Madcap?' said Mr. Eyre, laughing.

'Oh! yes,' she said gravely; 'you see, Frank and I were so dreadfully young—and two of a trade never agree!'

'And so, as I was old, the tales of my wickedness did not trouble you?'

'No,' said Madcap, very low; 'only—when you stayed away so long—sometimes they would knock hard at my ears to be let in; and when Lady Betty screamed out, "He's got another sweetheart; he'll never come back—he'll never come back"—I began to say to myself that I was to be punished just as I had punished Frank.'

'No,' said Mr. Eyre; 'others may suffer, but you never shall. It was our first parting; would to God,' he added, with sudden bitterness, 'that I might never have left you for an hour since the moment that we first met.'

'And yet you stayed away all yesterday and last night,' said Madcap, as they left the high road for a part of Mr. Eyre's estate that he rarely visited.

'Oh! a mere matter of business; it won't detain me again,' he said carelessly as through an open gateway they

> 'Rode under groves that looked a paradise
> Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
> That seemed the heavens upbreaking through the earth; . . .'

for high above them closed vast apple-boughs, now all coral and white with blossom, while at their feet the hyacinth of her million bells had woven a carpet of azure, across which now and again a bird swept low, as thinking that in seeking earth he had chanced to light upon heaven.

From overhead the busy coil of winged life struck

out a faint aromatic scent, penetrating as the wild far-off sweetness of the blackcap's note. To an exquisite rhythm of sight, sound, and scent Madcap seemed to move as she passed down that long arcade, silent, yet no more dumb under her delight than is a flower whose language is her breath, or a stormy sunset which speaks living words to us by its hues.

Mr. Eyre was no longer by her side, but he was close at hand; and there lies the soul of a woman's rest or unrest, whether the man she loves be within her reach or beyond it—and Madcap did not miss him as she went, counting her treasures up as poor mortals will, when all unknown to themselves the first quivering shaft of disaster threatens them.

'This apple blossom looks well for the crops,' said Mr. Eyre to the farmer who had joined him.

'Well, sir, there's the late frosts yet; and Providence don't usually take much 'count of farmers.'

'I suppose Providence is not responsible for all your gates being open,' said Mr. Eyre, who had enjoyed the ride through half a mile or so of uninterrupted orchard, but blamed the carelessness that had made it practicable.

'It's just that old Busby,' said the farmer, scratching his head, 'he must ride through here instead of by the high-road; he's scouring the country about the 'morial for the poor soul up at th' gaol, and every unborn babe in the parish must sign it, or he'll know the reason why.'

'Have you signed?' said Mr. Eyre, looking at the man keenly.

'No,' said the man sturdily; 'the woman drowned the child, and an ounce of fact is worth a pound of talk. Whether th' feyther was up at th' Tower or elsewhere—I beg your pardon, sir,' he added, stumbling in his speech; 'and to be sure, you were married to the young mistress then; but somebody she come to look for in this village, that's certain, and who else could it be but the young lord?'

'Pshaw!' said Mr. Eyre, with a gesture of disgust; 'it's impossible.'

'Young men will be young men,' said the farmer, shaking his head; 'they don't allus keep in mind Feyther Williams' advice, who

> 'Thought of the future whatever he did,
> That he never might grieve for the past.'

But Lor'! sir, what a sight of pleasant things that old chap must have missed!'

Mr. Eyre joined for a moment in the farmer's hilarity, then rode forward to rejoin his wife.

He had scarcely done so, when he heard behind him the almost noiseless sound of horses' hoofs coming over the turf; he guessed that they were in pursuit of him, and, turning to her, cried:

'One gallop, Madcap!' and at a touch, the blood-horses stretched fleetly out almost to racing speed, and like winged creatures breasted the long low hill

before them, while far behind, like dull, leaden echoes came the pursuing feet.

Had some of Madcap's own wild spirit leaped into Mr. Eyre's veins that day as they rode neck and neck, horses and riders alike exulting in that masterful rush through the soft spring air? Of their own will the horses seemed to stop at the prison gates of Marmiton; but before she could even cast a glance at the building, Mr. Eyre had seized her bridle, and turned her face and his own homewards.

'So ends a happy day,' he said, as at the end of the straggling town his keen eye detected a mounted messenger approaching, who bore in his hand one of those yellow envelopes that in rural lives not infrequently cause a revolution.

'No!' cried Madcap, still breathless, and all her young blood kindled in her by the dare-devil ride; 'it is only just begun!'

Prince Charlie, who knew his mistress's every mood, and had carried her bare-backed many a time in glorious spurt over hill and dale, tried to nestle his velvet nose in her hand, upon which she threw her arms round his neck.

'Oh! Charlie,' she whispered in one of his big, quivering ears, 'don't you feel *young* to-day—just as we used to long ago?'

Mr. Eyre read his message through twice; then telling the man that there was no answer, asked Madcap if she were too tired to ride farther.

'For it is your birthday, Madcap; and we will spend it together;—but to-morrow—to-morrow——'

'To-morrow will be as happy as to-day,' cried Madcap; but to this Mr. Eyre made no reply.

CHAPTER IV.

'He hoist up sails, and awa' sailed he,
And sailed unto a far countrie!
And when he looked his ring upon,
He knew she loved another man.

'He hoist up sails, and hame came he—
Hame unto his ain countrie;
The first he met on his own land,
It chanced to be a beggar man.'

THE beauty of Lord Lovel's woods was invisible to the man who after dark that night traversed them with now hasty, now lingering steps, inhaling with an odd sense of memory the crushed scent of the wild flowers that from time to time he trod underfoot.

No friendly gleam of light beckoned him towards the ancient house; no voice save a hireling's was likely to be uplifted in his welcome; and that sense of chillness with which we approach a place of which hearts once made home, oppressed the wanderer as he crossed his own threshold, and hearkened to the long reverberations of the great bell as it clanged through the lonely, deserted place.

At last a woman came; but, before she could ask a

question, he had passed her, and was standing in the midst of the dining-hall when, amazed at his audacity, lamp in hand, she had shut the hall-door and overtaken him.

'I want Job,' he said; 'will you send him to me?' And his voice and manner being of that sort which wins princess and peasant alike (for, after all, a princess, however finely she laces her bodice, can do no more than have a woman's heart inside it), she departed, and presently an elderly serving-man entered, who looked scrutinisingly at his visitor's back, at that moment turned towards him.

For a moment he stood, his pulses beating between doubt and hope; then, as the other turned in his walk, he ran forward, and seizing the young man in his arms, cried out in a perfect paroxysm of love and joy:

'So you've come home at last, my dear, dear little Master Frank!'

'Yes, Job; come back at last,' said his master, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder; 'and come home to stay, please God.'

'That's good hearing,' said Job, retreating a step to gaze at his new-found treasure; 'but what brought you home so sudden-like?' he added, certain misgivings darting painfully through his mind.

'I got home-sick,' said the young fellow, still resolutely fighting off a certain thought that had beset him ever since he had set foot on English soil;

'and, perhaps, I was tired of playing at schoolboy, and wanted to be my own master—and yours, too, old friend,' he added, wringing Job's hand, as though he found in that honest palm all the welcome man could desire.

'God bless your little heart!' said Job, to whom the birth of Frank was a mere matter of yesterday, and this stalwart young soldier no bigger than the toddling child whose steps he had so often guarded from danger; 'but no bells rung! no carriage to meet you! What'll folks say to your coming home in this promiskis sort of way?'

'That as I've been travelling since daybreak I must be hungry,' said Frank, seizing the candle. 'Come along, Job. I've ransacked the larder too often not to know its whereabouts.'

Job, as he followed those light heels, thought how bright the house had all at once become with that sunshine which his young master carried with him everywhere—in at the chinks of men's shut hearts, and in lonely places that the sun had forgotten, and, in short, into every nook and corner where his eye glanced, and his step came. And travel-stained as he was, he yet made one of those lovely figures that no man, nor woman either, could look on without admiration of that sort which leans to love.

'A poor home-coming!' said Job, shaking his head, as he served his master at the kitchen-table; 'and you've come a bit too early, or a bit too late,' he

added below his breath, wistfully searching Frank's face for the wickedness nowhere to be found in it.

The young fellow caught the look, and coloured. He too longed, yet feared to ask a certain question, but it was unasked still when at midnight he stood alone in his chamber, and, drawing aside the curtain from his mother's picture, answered in words to the mute welcome her lips seemed to speak.

'I've come home, mother,' he said simply, just as though she heard him; 'and you'll help me;' and perhaps she did hear her boy, and did help him—afterwards—who knows? Sleep was impossible to him; here, under his own roof-tree, he realised what his future life must and should be, as his father's had been before him. All that he looked on, all that he touched, spoke to him of duty, and the noble traditions of an unstained name; and, as he threw the casement wide, and hearkened to the night wind as it rustled like a sigh through the woods below, his heart swelled within him, and he swore that he would be a faithful steward to the hundreds of sleeping souls entrusted to his care. The morning sun was shining in his eyes when he awoke and descended to the library, where Job, no longer the transported friend, but the faithful domestic, awaited him with a breakfast that was the product of a sleepless night.

It vexed the old man that his master would look through the open windows instead of at his plate; and yet who could take his eyes from those three avenues,

each above a mile in length, through whose fretted aisles, like a magnificent burst of melody from an unseen source, had swept the tide of God's eternal green?

'I don't s'pose you've seen anything since you went away to beat *that*,' remarked Job complacently; 'but Lor', what can you expect out of England, Master Frank?'

Frank laughed, and his laugh was something to remember, for its delightful ring, and the suggestions of happiness both to himself and others that it unconsciously brought.

'And yet there are some fine sights abroad, Job, as you would say if you could see them.'

'And you liked 'em so well you could stay away these six years?' said Job reproachfully.

'There was work to do,' said Frank, the colour rising to his face (and this was one of those traits that warmed men's hearts to him, as showing that in his mind still lurked the ingenuousness of earlier years). 'A man does not run away home when his comrades are fighting; and I was wanted, Job, and nearly got my billet here,' he added, laughing, as he touched a scar on his left temple that gave earnestness to the almost boyish beauty of his face.

'So it wasn't a bit of foolishness that kept you abroad all these years?' cried Job triumphantly. 'Love's all very well, but fighting's better; it warms the cockles of one's heart, and when all's said, it's the real work a man's done, not the times he's made a

fool of himself, that he likes to think of when he's got the blues, and you'll have work enough to do about the estate, without thinking of any love-making this ever so long.'

'I'll leave that to the Squire,' said Frank, laughing. 'Is he as bad as ever?'

'The Squire has left the Hall,' said Job, putting on a deceitful air of innocence as he poured his master out a second cup of coffee. 'He's eating frogs this blessed minute, no doubt; though I'm much mistook if Nancy of the Mill cottons down to eating 'em along with him.'

'The old Squire has left Lovel?' cried Frank, pushing back his plate.

'To be sure,' said Job, with an elaborate appearance of unconcern; 'it must be nigh on five year and a half ago that the county folks made up their minds that they couldn't stand Miss Nancy, and so——'

'And so the Red Hall's empty!' exclaimed Lord Lovel, starting up from his seat; 'and I've been thinking of that old reprobate as holding his court there, and setting a bad example to the neighbourhood—an influence that would dwarf mine so hopelessly, Job, that I could make no way against it.'

'Well—well,' said Job deprecatingly, 'he were a rare bit of human natur', to be sure; and human natur's lively and interestin', Master Frank, while the Ten Commandments in the main is dull.'

'But they don't bring disgrace in their train,' said

Frank, walking to the window and looking out. 'Who was it you said was living at the Red Hall now?'

'His son,' said Job, in a tone of suspicious mildness, as he busied himself about the table; 'he's been here for years, and a new order of things it is up yonder—church and children, and sweethearting—but always with his own wife . . . . they ride by here often, and I wonder how long it will last,' added Job, with a smile.

'Barrington Eyre is *married!*' cried Frank, advancing, 'then what became of—of——'

'Mr. Barrington was killed in a duel,' said Job, inwardly marvelling at his master's ignorance; 'it's young Mr. Eyre that's living up at the Hall now.'

'Young Mr. Eyre!' cried Frank, starting back as though a bullet had struck him—'old Mr. Eyre, you mean—and he is here—*here*—impossible!'

'Well, he ain't a chicken, to be sure,' said Job impartially, 'that's why I've got some hopes of him yet; when folks of his age takes a moral turn, it gets fixed into a sort of habit with 'em.'

'Then he *has* turned over a new leaf!' exclaimed Frank involuntarily.

'Lor', Master Frank, I wonder if he knows his own face in the glass, he's that altered; he's a justice and a magistrate, and punishes folks for being wicked instead of making 'em so, as he and all the Eyres did afore him. But it's deadly dull in the village now,' added Job regretfully, 'or so the women say; all the

pretty chicks hereabouts go unchucked, and if there's a bit of beauty growing up in the place, there ain't a soul in life to discover it.'

'Would you have him as bad as his father?' burst out poor Frank in a rage, and still pale with the shock of finding Madcap living at his very gates.

'Well,' said Job, in a tone that befitted his name, 'I hope it may last; but there's no reckoning on them Eyres; and though he just dotes on her now—women cloy, even the best of 'em—God A'mighty mostly makes 'em too sweet or too sour, and there's few a man can sup of every day and not wish for a change once by whiles, Master Frank.'

But the latter part of Job's dissertation was lost on Frank, who had escaped through the open window, and was striding down the central avenue as for a wager.

This sudden knowledge of her nearness for the moment overcame him—it was as though a picture he had been gazing at from a distance had stepped out of its frame to stand beside him, and he must take its flesh-and-blood hand in his own, and change the likeness of his face towards it . . . . for while in his memory, and afar off, she was still his sweet little Madcap, his tyrant, his love . . . . here at his gates she was wife to his friend only—his friend who had stolen her from him, but who had made her—happy.

He looked around him—that exquisite sense of newness with which the old country ever strikes us after

long sojourn in burning climes, gradually stole upon and soothed him ; and the pride in his own soil, that every true man knows, awoke and prompted thoughts of an existence apart from love. With a sudden backward movement of the shoulders, as though he shook some weight from them, he stood for a moment to watch the woven dazzle of light and shadow above . . . . a shaft of sunlight fell full on the young, beautiful face, refined almost to sternness by its absorption of thought ; but, like magic, the look faded, as almost at his side there broke forth a peal of childish laughter, and, with a violent start, he perceived how he had reached a portion of his estate that adjoined Mr. Eyre's, a tall hedge forming the boundary between them.

He was turning to retrace his steps when a woman's voice, following on the others', drove the blood from his cheek, and rooted him to where he stood. A moment, and he was parting the young leaves to look to the meadow beyond, across which he saw his lost Madcap coming, holding up her gown with one rounded arm, a basket in her hand, and a child on either side, tripping over the cowslips' heads, with a footfall light as a shadow, quick as a sunbeam—

> 'A woman perfect as a young man's dream,
> And breathing beauty and the old sweet air
> Of the fair days of old, when man was young
> And life an epic.'

Heavens, how he had forgotten her! Memory's

colours had no more power to paint her as she lived and breathed than an echo is able to repeat the tone of a well-loved voice; and if but a moment ago he had thought of her as happy, how poor and pale a thing that happiness seemed beside this radiant joy that glowed with colour, life, and song! And he realised then that in her choice she had done well—that she might never have looked as she looked then, if she had married himself; and if the man's passionate love leaped up in him at sight of her, a nobler instinct struggled above, and thrust it down.

'Look,' she cried, 'here and here, and here!' and at each word stooped to pluck a cowslip from its stalk, yet found time between to kiss the little eager faces so near her own, and so for the first time brought her motherhood home to Frank's mind; for perpetually as she had dwelt in his mind all these years, Madcap as a mother had never for a second presented herself to his imagination.

His heart throbbed; inexpressibly sacred and more dear to him in this most moving, pathetic situation a woman can fill in the eyes of the man who loves her, was Madcap then. Her voice came to him like a revelation as she dropped her basket to throw an arm round each child's neck and call them her little loves, her sweethearts . . . . after all, might not the secret of her happiness lie with *them*, not with Mr. Eyre?

'And now for the cowslip ball,' she cried, and came all breathless to the brook, and sat down beside it

with her lapful of gold—'God's gold,' as Doune, who was beginning to understand what his prayers meant, with some condescension informed Dody.

'But me know sumfin' too,' said Dody, who was watching the fall of each cowslip's head with absorbed attention—

'"A wobin and a wren
Are God A'mighty's cock and hen."

Did 'oo know *zat*, mummy?'

'No,' said Madcap, laughing; 'but Dody knows lots and lots of things that mummy doesn't!'

'Me'll seep wiz 'oo to-night,' said Dody, with a royal nod, 'and then me'll tell 'oo.'

'Josephine won't let you,' said Doune, who looked upon such talk as a frivolous interruption to cowsliping, and whose love for his mother was rarely shown in outward expression.

'His father's son,' thought Frank, as he looked at him with a momentary throb of aversion; then away from him to Dody, who in feature and colouring equally resembled Mr. Eyre, but carried a subtle look of Madcap in his every look and gesture that won Frank's heart on the spot, as later on, Frank won his —and kept it, too, to the last. To the young fellow, the making of that cowslip ball was an idyl, and never sure was a string more prettily held than by this little pair of lads, so serious, so intent, so fearful lest even by a wandering glance after a butterfly a shake should be engendered and a blossom spilled; while

between them knelt Madcap in her white gown, swinging those golden bells as one who weaves in with each a hidden joy, a sweet content, that made the wreathing of this child's plaything as true an index to her life as though Frank had followed it, day by day, for the past six years.

'*Eeny* more fowers, mummy?' said Dody, speaking for the first time since the ball had been commenced.

Yes! there was one more; it was between Madcap's fingers then. She was looking into its heart, cinque-spotted; but she saw not the flower, she had forgotten her children; a dark beloved face, seldom an hour absent from her side, had risen before her, and in spirit she had leaped to it, and was crying out—'Yesterday, I wished you away; but, to-day, I wish you *here!*'

'Me *knows* me'll drop it,' said Dody, in a voice of grave rebuke; and then Madcap came to herself with a start, and swung her cowslip, and with much squeezing of certain little fat hands inside it, the ball was tied and tossed high in the air, with the magic invocation:

'Tisty-tosty, fair and forty,
How many years shall I live?
One——'

Down slipped the golden ball through Madcap's fingers, and with a shout of joy was seized on by the children, who held it up for her to smell—velvety, voluptuous, like a full rich draught of summer after the wayward sips of sweetness that lurk in the pale cups of primrose and anemone! As the children ran

away with their treasure, Madcap cast a quick look around, and drew from her bosom a letter, that she first kissed, then held a moment in her hand, as a child will delight to abstain for a moment from its coveted cake; and Frank wondered what could be on the page to bring such lovely lights and shadows to her face as she read. Was it, then, Mr. Eyre's habit to write his wife a love-letter every time she took a morning walk without him? She had found it on her pillow that morning when she had awakened to find Mr. Eyre gone; and this was his letter—the first love-letter Mr. Eyre had ever written his wife:

'Madcap,' he said, 'I go to my father, who is dying. This is our first parting, the first in six long happy years, and I leave you thus rather than that the word "Farewell" should be spoken between us; it is a word that must not, *shall* not, hold any meaning for you and me. In three days, at latest, I will return, or summon you to my side. I would take you with me, but such scenes, such associations, are not for you. Wife—sweetheart—joy of my life, write to me the moment you receive this; and every day do not let those rogues delay you for one moment. Pshaw! I know thou lovest me in thy real heart better, I think, than those pretty boys I gave thee.

'I am, now and always,

'Your loving, faithful husband,

'EYRE.'

'I didn't think it of you, Master Frank; no, that I didn't,' said a reproachful voice at Frank's elbow; 'let alone the Bible, I never know'd no good as ever come to a Peeping Tom; they mostly peeps after petticoats, and petticoats bring misfortins.'

'What is it?' said Frank, whose colour announced him fully alive to the meanness of the action in which he had been caught. '*Was* that letter from him?' he added mentally.

'Why, Colonel Busby's asking for you; sure you don't forget *him*, Master Frank, the biggest fool in these parts.'

'Confound him!' cried Frank heartily. 'Well, I hope the callers have begun early enough.'

'It's not a call exactly,' said Job, 'it's business. I s'pose they want you to sign the 'morial they're getting up for that poor soul up yonder;' and he pointed in the direction of Marmiton.

'What poor soul?' said Frank, for a moment the thought of Madcap swept aside.

'The woman what's condemned to death for drowning a child in the Shifting Pool,' said Job, speaking slowly and watching the effect of his words.

'Poor wretch!' said Frank absently; 'by the way, Job, do you know if Mr. Eyre is from home?'

'What made you think of that?' said Job, with a shrewd suspicion as to what his master had been peeping at; 'well, he *is*—I heard it just now—the old Squire is dying at last, and Mr. Eyre he was

telegraphed for yesterday, but wouldn't go cos 'twas his wife's birthday ; but, Lor', Master Frank, don't 'ee go in for looking through Mr. Eyre's hedges; he's a bad one to meddle wi', an' David ain't the only one as got into trouble through a-spying after what warn't his'n.'

'Ah, how do you do, my dear Lovel?' said Colonel Busby as Frank entered the library by the window; 'rejoiced to see you home again, and looking so bright and well; you have come, too, in the very nick of time to render me a most valuable assistance. For some reason, Eyre has set himself from the first against that unhappy woman up at the gaol, and will cut off her last chance of life if he can; but with your signature'—and he suddenly unfurled before Frank's astonished eyes a scroll on which were inscribed names varying in dignity from that of a Lord of the Manor to a tiller of the same—'we hope to defeat him yet.'

'What is it?' said Frank, passing his hand over his mouth to hide a smile, Colonel Busby's little fat form and extended scroll irrepressibly suggesting the personage who in a pantomime is always striving to get a hearing, but never succeeds.

'Have you not heard?' said the Colonel, who thought himself the pivot on which the world turned; 'it's the memorial to the Home Secretary.'

'Of course,' said Frank, apparently waking up, 'it's about a cowslip—I mean a man—no, a woman——'

'A woman,' said Colonel Busby, in a tone of stern rebuke, 'who now lies under sentence of death. A woman,' he repeated, 'who must be saved.'

'This won't do,' thought Frank, and compelled himself to thrust the thought of Madcap aside, and take the memorial in his hands.

The first few lines carried little meaning to his mind, but as he read on a change passed over his face. 'A stranger to the place,' he said, still looking at the paper, 'and she came here in search of some unknown person?'

'Yes,' said Colonel Busby, nodding; 'the father probably—there have been suspicions,' he went on, 'but it's odd that none have pointed in what I'd swear is the right direction;' and he made a significant gesture towards the Hall.

'What!' cried Frank, his bright face suddenly growing pale as death.

Colonel Busby nodded.

'To be plain with you,' he said, 'and it's more than I dare to be with any other soul, for Eyre leads the whole county by the nose, you're suspected of what I firmly believe *he* is guilty of. You see, it happened five and a half years ago, and we all know what his life was before his marriage—and there's not a doubt the woman came in search of the father.'

Frank's hand suddenly closed on the parchment—for a moment sight failed, and he felt as if the life were going out of him in agonising convulsive throbs;

then, as the necessity for self-control smote him, he drew himself erect, and appeared to be reading what was in reality a blank to him.

'If the murder were committed five and a half years ago,' he said, 'how comes it that the mother is only now convicted?'

'It is not the mother,' said Colonel Busby, staggered in his previous convictions by Frank's manner; 'it's supposed that this was her servant, and that the crime was committed unknown to the parents.'

'Is she a small sandy-haired woman, bordering on middle age?' said Frank, the words escaping him involuntarily.

'To be sure,' said Colonel Busby, more and more depressed by his conviction of Frank's guilt; 'a mean-looking creature.'

'Thank God!' cried Frank, in a more natural voice, his mind relieved of at least one terrible fear. 'And her mistress, has she been here? Is she in the place?'

'We don't know that she has a mistress,' said Colonel Busby, staring at the young man; 'it's a mere guess, but she seems in mortal dread of some unknown person coming before she dies, and it looks suspicious.'

'Then she has confessed nothing?' said Frank eagerly.

'Nothing publicly. What she said to Mr. Eyre in private we don't know. She asked for him directly the trial was over, and they were closeted together

some time. It was he who committed her to prison on mere suspicion of the deed, and, in fact, from first to last has shown an extraordinary interest in the case and the woman.'

An exclamation burst from Frank's lips ; but calming himself by a great effort, he said, 'Mr. Eyre is absent from home?'

'Yes; but before leaving he wrote to town. You know his influence in high quarters, and this influence he is using *against her*.'

'What!' cried Frank, recoiling a step. 'He could save this woman's life and will not?'

Colonel Busby nodded.

'You know what he is,' he said; 'immovable when he has once made his mind up. "Guilty she is, and hanged she shall be," that's the way he talks. But you'll sign, of course?'

Mechanically the young man took the pen thrust upon him, and signed his name ; but, having done so, his eye was arrested by the signature immediately above his own—'H. Clarke.'

'Hester Clarke!' he almost shouted. 'Who signed that name? You said that she was not here ; that—that——'

'I see no Hester Clarke there,' said Colonel Busby, looking over his shoulder; 'that's the signature of Clarke, the butcher, Christian name, Henry. Is that the name of the mother?' he added sharply, and with bitter disappointment in his heart that the public pil-

lory was not for Mr. Eyre after all—but Frank, pale to the lips, did not reply. The question he had never dared to ask through all those years of absence had answered itself almost in the hour of his return, and the matchless beauty of his woods smote him with a cruel sense of pain as he looked out upon them.

'Well, well,' said Colonel Busby, 'don't take it to heart; it may blow over, and it might have happened to anybody, you know; but, of course, it will make you anxious to pull the woman through.'

'What!' said Frank, with so much haughtiness, that Colonel Busby took an involuntary skip to the door, and with a hurried good-morning, closed it behind him.

'And I could have sworn,' he muttered venomously, as he seized his hat, 'that the father was to be found at the Red Hall!'

'I'm sure of it, sir,' said Job, appearing, and handing the angry gentleman his stick: 'and what's more, we'll prove it. It ain't *in* a Lovel to do a mean action.'

'So you've been listening at the key-hole, hey?' said Colonel Busby, unconscious of missing an opportunity.

'I have the honour of my master's confidence, sir,' said Job drily; and Colonel Busby, reflecting too late that this man might have been valuable to him, found the door gently but firmly closed in his face.

'Bless you for an old bumble-bee!' said Job fervently from the other side. 'Seems as if fools like you was born just to teach wise folks like us patience;

and when God A'mighty thinks you've taught us enough, He just lets you crack your own empty head against a window-pane; but you went bumbling and buzzing into the right jam-pot when you said the father was up at the Red Hall, not here.'

CHAPTER V.

'That hot youth—a tree with a rough bark,
Which covers all with its shadow, prospect and path.'

AT about the time Madcap was sitting down to write Mr. Eyre a letter, he was entering the courtyard of a private hotel in the Rue Rivoli, a quick glance at the windows assuring him that he had not arrived too late.

'My master is very ill, sir,' said the old servant, who had hastened down to meet him; 'but he has just rallied in a wonderful way, and is talking quite like himself.'

'Is that you?' said old Mr. Eyre, whose voice and eyes seemed the only living things about him, as he lay on his bed a ghastly, stricken shape, incapable of movement. 'I did not expect you. Does the Izaak Walton business combined with matrimony grow a trifle wearisome, after all?'

'We will discuss my private affairs when we are alone,' said his son, with a glance towards the be-ribboned, be-jewelled person who boldly kept her place by his father's side.

'You can go, my dear,' said the old man, turning his eyes on her sarcastically, 'and amuse yourself by putting on a few more gewgaws. You will cut a fine figure in 'em when I am gone, and, if you play your cards well, may even marry—my courier!'

The door closed with a bang on a petticoat, that on the way to it had contrived to overturn a table laden with bottles and other paraphernalia of sickness.

'A sweet creature!' said Mr. Eyre drily; 'her playful spirit has kept me alive these five years. There's no "damned iteration" about *her;* but, on the contrary, a never-ending variety—and she nurses me devotedly. There's time yet to put a codicil to my will.'

He smiled sardonically at his son's back, but that gentleman had moved away, and was looking out of the open window.

'And I really am not difficult to please,' he went on. 'I think it was Byron's servant, Fletcher, who remarked that he never knew a lady who could not govern his master, except his wife . . . but I have omitted to inquire for the health of my daughter-in-law, whose acquaintance, by the way, I have never made.'

'She is well,' said Mr. Eyre briefly.

'She must be a wonderful creature,' said the old man, a sneer lifting his hard mouth; 'in short, the whole race of women—epitomised. I am told she is handsome.'

Mr. Eyre half smiled in scorn of such a description of Madcap—Madcap of whom, with Sir Thomas Overbury's milkmaid, might be said, 'all her excellences stand in her silently as if they had stolen on her without her knowledge . . . .'

'But so were the others,' continued old Mr. Eyre; 'and though I could understand your remaining so long in a *coin du feu* to which you were not legally tied—a great charm that, and one that has kept many a man in it for life out of pure contradiction—this *married* business of yours is beyond me. "O! mirth and innocence! O! milk and water!"'

'Did you summon me here solely to discuss such topics as these?' said his son, pausing a moment in his walk.

'I didn't send for you to preach to me,' said the old man, with a snarl; 'keep your damned moral airs for Arcadia; and as to dying, what's life—what's death? The one breeds a worm, the other feeds it; and, like Byron, I hope it is no sin to laugh at all things; for, after all, what are all things but a show? But you'll stay here,' he added, in a different tone, 'whether it's three hours or three weeks, to the end.'

'No,' said Mr. Eyre; 'I can remain here but three days.'

'Be sure I'll not detain you a moment longer than I am obliged,' said the old man drily. 'Why didn't you bring her?' he added sharply; 'there's no knowing what Blue Beard's closet she mayn't be peeping

into in your absence—so much innocence requires a deal of watching over.'

'Oh, I'm not afraid,' said Mr. Eyre indifferently.

'You are fortunate,' said the old man; '*I* never tried so risky an experiment. My idea of happiness has been independence of everything and everybody; and that you can't be, when you see the direct effect of your every deed, good or evil, upon those you love —pshaw!' he added, as though ashamed of the momentary touch of feeling; 'what do I know of love? Love with old men, as a great authority takes care to inform us, costs *trente mille francs* a-year.'

Mr. Eyre turned away, and the old man's eyes followed him, as with firm step he walked to and fro.

'The life suits you,' he said suddenly; 'you look years younger than when I saw you last—clearly, respectability has its gains. I don't know why it should not, if it pulls with your inclination; besides, you sacrifice nothing to it, and there you show sense. After all, can appearances and the world's good opinion give you a single thing worth having? Health, sleep, appetite, freedom, friendship — it's curious how little all these are affected by what people say.'

'Good name in man or woman,' said Mr. Eyre absently, his soul and thoughts with Madcap.

'Pooh,' said the old man, 'that's if their name is their living, not otherwise. You like your present

life because your wife suits you; if she didn't, you would think twice before settling among those dullards and making yourself one of them. And to be sure, when you die,' he went on, reverting to his usual tone, 'there will be much lip-service, but not a real tear among those who follow you—your burial may be more decorous, but it won't be half as well attended as mine. To be really loved by your neighbours, you must fail in life from their point of view, and they must pity you; to be aware of the secret difficulties and backslidings of your friends is to love them, while to hear perpetually of their virtues and successes is to avoid their very mention. Now in the country you will always be a Greek quotation that nobody understands, a standing reminder to folks of their ignorance, and detested accordingly; but in town there's a great field open to you: in Parliament you will have full scope for your abilities, and since you feel the disgrace of our name so keenly, you might even have the opportunity of being the founder of a new line.'

'I have thought of it before,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly, 'but I won't quit my country life. Ten years ago, perhaps, I might have thought of it, but now——'

'And so the life contents you?' said the old man. 'But mark me, it won't always. Happiness alone will never satisfy an Eyre; besides, you're vegetating—not really enjoying life. Who is it that says one must be light-hearted as a Frenchman of the eighteenth

century, or sensual as an Italian of the sixteenth, to be actually happy?'

'I desire no more,' said Mr. Eyre, looking at his watch; 'and now I must leave you for a short time, to write letters.'

As he left the room by one door, the abigail entered it by the other.

'More gewgaws,' said his father, 'and more ribbons! Are you in hopes of making an impression on my son? My sweet creature, you ain't half handsome enough; he was always more particular in the matter of women's looks than I.'

CHAPTER VI.

'Consequences are unpitying.'

At about the time Mr. Eyre was entering his father's hotel, a woman rang with trembling hand the great bell at the gaol gates of Marmiton; and the chaplain, who was coming out, paused to look at her with a sudden quick suspicion of the truth.

'Sir, will you let me into the prison?—for God's sake!'

He looked at her more attentively. Yes; this must be the mother—voice—attitude—eyes—all betrayed an agony of impatience rarely shown by a woman, save where the life of her child is concerned.

'You wish to see the woman, Mistake?'

'The woman who lies under sentence of death for

the murder of a child,' she said; 'they told me I should not be able to gain admission to-night; but you will let me in, if but for one moment?'

'It is against the rules,' he said, as he retraced his steps, 'but in this case——' and he rang and gained admission.

Having taken her to his room, he went in search of the governor of the gaol, and the two returned together.

She sprang up at the sound of their steps, and hurried towards them.

'Your name?' said the governor.

'Hester Clarke — take me to her,' she added imploringly; and without a word or question, impelled by that terrible force of motherhood to do her will, the governor, calling a gaoler, himself conducted her to the cell where the condemned woman lay. Outside the threshold she paused. 'I must go in alone,' she said; and as the gaoler drew the door to with a clang, he saw her standing just within, looking towards a huddled up heap, scarcely visible by the light of the evening sky. For a moment the man without lingered, holding his breath; but all was still; then through the prison wall pierced an awful cry and condemnation, all in one.

'Janet!'

The prisoner had crouched away at the approach of footsteps; her hands pressed against her ears, her face buried in her knees; but at the sound of that

voice, a convulsive movement shook her from head to foot.

'It was my child!' cried the new-comer, advancing a step, and then, with both arms lifted and held before her eyes, the condemned woman fell on her knees, and dragging herself painfully along the flagged stones, reached the feet of her visitor, and lay huddled there.

'Mistress!' she said, in a voice that was nothing like human, 'Mistress . . . .'

For a moment the mother stood motionless, looking down on the sordid outline at her feet; then a swift, ungovernable impulse of hatred seized and tossed her on its wave. *This*—this poor, contemptible thing had found power to rob her of that treasure more dear to her than life, for which her heart plained night and day like a sobbing sick child in its deserted cradle . . . .

'Kill me, mistress,' said Janet, half looking up, and seeing that terrible face above her, those uplifted hands clenched as in act to strike.

'Kill you!' cried the mother—'one short, fierce pang, and all over; and for me—for me . . . . God may forgive you!' she broke out, with that old, deathless cry of the broken-hearted, 'but *I* never will!'

The woman at her feet trembled under the sound of that voice, even more terrible in reality than in her dreams—then her hand went up to what looked like a string of dull-coloured knotted rags round her throat, and clenched them fast.

'If you'd come five minutes later,' she said slowly, 'I'd ha' been past your forgiveness—they're tired of watching me, and left me alone half an hour—I was tying the ends o' this to the bed when I heard steps . . . . I'd ha' faced death willing rather than ha' faced you. P'r'aps if you'd found me dead, you'd ha' found a word of pity to say in ears as couldn't hear . . . .'

'There's no pity in my heart,' said her mistress in a dull, hard tone. '*You* had none when you killed it . . . . my little baby . . . .'

'Mistress!' cried Janet, in anguish, 'why wasn't *that* in your voice when I put the baby in your arms first? You thrust it away, and said you hated it, because it looked at you with its father's eyes . . . . and if you iver took it to your breast in love, 'twas when I was not by to see . . . . an' when I asked you to let me take it to my own people you never said me nay, but let it go wi'out a kiss or a look . . . . but when it was gone you missed it, an' its little ways came back on you like an old tune, an' you wanted the baby home agen . . . . mistress . . . . mistress . . . .'

She dared to look up, but the mother's face was hidden; she stretched her hand and touched her robe, but from that light contact the other recoiled—'The hand that killed my child,' she muttered, shuddering in every limb.

'No,' said Janet sadly; 'I didn't kill the wee thing;

but I am as guilty as if I did, and that's why I pleaded guilty—that, and because 'twas easier to die than look you in the face agen.'

'You did not kill it!' repeated the mother, seizing Janet's arm in a grasp of steel.

'No,' said Janet. 'Mistress . . . . if you'll sit down beside me, I'll try to tell you . . . .'

She groped her way to the edge of the pallet, and with uncertain steps the mother crossed the cell, and sat down beside her.

The moment had come when they must look in each other's face, and slowly in the fading light their eyes met.

'Tell me,' said the mother, scarcely above her breath.

'When I asked you to let me take the baby away,' said Janet, looking on the ground, 'I'd a wild thought to lay it at its father's door—its father that throwed you aside to be happy wi' his new love; an' though you'd never told me his name, in the fever you dropped a word here an' there, an' one day I found something by chance, an' afterwards I took the baby away by your leave, but I didn't go to my own people. I'd got two names in my mind, and one was the Red Hall, and the other was Lovel. When my money was all gone, I begged my way, but always the child lay warm agen me, and wanted nothing, an' so, at last, I got here; but 'twas a mistake. An old man liv'd up at the Hall, and the young lord were away

wi' his regiment in foreign parts; so I'd nothing to do but just to go back to you wi' that as you hated so bitter, an' wished dead an' out o' sight—or so I thought then, as I sat down by the pool to rest, well-nigh clemmed wi' hunger, an' stiff wi' cold.'

She shivered; then, half cowering away, tried to pierce the gloom that was gradually shutting out from her the motionless figure by her side.

'It was but a bit of a pool—I'd never have guessed 'twere deep enough to hide anything—and more than one had passed by while I sat beside it—an' all at once the thought came to me that I'd lay the baby down beside it, and leave it there—some one 'ud find it, and care for it, an' I'd go back and tell you it had died; an' you'd be happy, an' pr'aps your life 'ud not be quite spoiled after all.

'I kissed the little thing, an' laid it down beside the pool, an' I hid behind the trees to watch; but no one came, and I were just battling it out if I'd wait till 'twas found, wi' the chance of my being caught and put in prison, or beg my way back to you, when I heard a little cry an' a splash, an' when I ran to the pool the baby was gone . . . . but there was a great eddy on the face of the pool . . . . an' I were just frozen, an' not able to dash in after it, every moment thinking to see it come to the surface . . . . but he were so wrapped up he must ha' sunk like a stone. . . .

'I'd forgot how strong he was for his age, an' how he could roll himself along the ground'—the woman

went on—'and when the pool was still, I sat down beside it, wi' no more power to move from it than if I'd been dead.

'A labourer that had gone by before, passed by again, an' looked at me hard, just as if he knew what was in the pool; but he didn't speak, and I bided there all that night wi' the sound of that splash and cry in my ears. But when daylight broke, something seemed to set me on my feet, and drew me away, an' I went wi'out ever looking back; an' so by days and nights begged my way back to you.'

There was too little light in the cell now for the two women to discern each other by; but that silent, invisible figure beside Janet was more terrible to her than the wildest reproaches of tongue and eye could have been. 'Mistress,' she whispered, not daring to touch her—'Mistress, you hear . . . . you know now. When I got back, you ran to me an' tore the shawl from my breast, "My child—where's my child?" you said. It was the mother's heart crying out at last, an' mine just dropped like a stone, an' I had no words to tell you but that 'twas dead. "Take me to it," you cried; an' then I remembered how that morning I'd passed a little new-made grave in a quiet churchyard, an' it came to me, like a voice, that I'd take you there; 'twas a foundling's that none was like to visit, an' you laid there all that night in the rain, and I beside you; an' then the brain-fever took you, an' when you came to yourself again, you never asked to see the grave,

only you was always looking for such a child as yours might ha' been had he lived to grow up. An' so we went about lookin'—always lookin' for what we never found.

'I used to lie awake at nights fixin' it in my mind what I told you of the baby's dyin', lest I'd forget, an' tell you somethin' different—how it smiled when I said "mamma," for all he was so little; an' how his fingers took hold on mine when the pain in his throat got worse, and last of all took him. . . .

'But one day, in a paper that come in my way, I saw how a pool had dried up in a village, an' how, at the bottom, there was found a little skeleton; an' night an' day I saw but the pool—always the pool, and had that splash in my ears, till one day I put my money together, an', not saying a word to a living soul, set out, and never restin' till I had reached it; an' the first thing I saw was the man on the other side as had seen me sitting there,—first wi' the baby in my arms, and then wi'out him.

'A magistrate was passing; he committed me to prison, while another man would only ha' bin lookin'. He's a great man in these parts; he come to see me yesterday, an' I asked him to get me hanged off quick afore you could come an' know 'twas me; an' if you'd come to-morrow, I'd ha' been buried, an' you'd never ha' known. But I've seen you, an' told you the truth now, an' 'twixt this an' Saturday you'll say a word—just a word. . . .'

When the turnkey entered a few seconds later, it was to find the two women sitting apart, the one huddled up in the same attitude in which he had last seen her, the other looking straight before her with wide-open, fixed eyes, and arms in the attitude of one who hugged to her breast some small, slight burden that, invisible to all others, was to herself a living and tangible thing.

CHAPTER VII.

'And all fancies yearn to cover
The hard earth on which she passes
With the thymy scented grasses.'

THE Shifting Pool lay at the end of a lane, close to the great gates of the Towers, and here, early on the morrow of Mr. Eyre's departure, a woman came with faltering step, and stood beside it, her shrinking gaze peering over into the now dried-up pit below.

'She might have gone in after it,' she muttered, in a hard, bitter tone; 'it was not deep enough to drown her . . . .' then, with a low, strangled cry, fell down on her knees, and rocked herself to and fro, uttering broken words of passionate endearment, as though what she held in her arms were a living thing, and could hear her.

Though close to the village, the spot was rarely frequented, save by a labourer or two going to or returning from their work, and Hester remained undisturbed

for more than an hour, at the end of which time a wood-cutter, hastening to the feast of gossip then going forward up at the village, spied her, and rushed, red-hot with his information, into the midst of the crowd, which thereupon set off running as though possessed towards the pool. Such a saturnalia of scandal had never been known within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, and the farmer had left his fields, the hind his plough, the wheelwright his shop, and the smith his forge, the sexton his spade beside a half-dug grave, and the housewife her bread with the yeast rising, to stand in the village street, and talk one against another of the events of the past few days.

And now to hear that *she*—the inevitable she to whom the whole tragedy might be set down—was actually sitting by the pool, to be stared at and cross-questioned to their heart's content, gave wings to the slow and strength to the feeble, while all such party distinctions as church and chapel, purse and stocking, were forgot in the general *suave qui peut* that ensued. The most envied of the company was Jim the Fool, who arrived first, but was able to make no further use of his advantages than to make such a face as transformed him from the harmless baboon to the malignant satyr.

'There she be,' screamed Sally Genge, who arrived second, 'a sittin' there as comfortable as *you* please, an' her up yon to be hanged o' Saturday. 'Tis well to make other folks die for sins as we've drove 'em to,

ain't it?' and she turned with a jeering laugh to the crowd that followed at her heels.

'Tush!' said a burly farmer, who, though fat and scant of breath, had contrived to outstep most of his neighbours. 'Young woman'—and he turned, starting with surprise at the beauty of the face that met his gaze—'maybe the bairn was drowned against your will——'

'A cuckoo mother,' cried Sally fiercely, 'who left her young in a stranger's nest! How were she to 'spect other folk to do that for her child as she wouldn't hersel'?'

Hester had started to her feet, and stood trembling, and looking from one to another of the crowd, finding in the men's faces only a stupid, reluctant admiration, in the women's a cruel condemnation that, whether expressed by word or look, was identical.

'Was your baby so little to ye that ye didn't even miss it, or think it worth seeking till now?' said the blacksmith's wife, usually a gentle soul enough, but to-day made fierce by that which puts the heart of a lion into the timidest woman—the thought of a helpless child abandoned to its death through the carelessness of its mother.

'Can't 'ee speak?' cried another, that impulse of savagery which ever lurks in a crowd, and is prepared to break out so soon as its own fatal strength of numbers is made known to it, giving tongue in her voice. 'Couldn't 'ee ha' come afore and spoke up a word for the poor soul what's to be hanged o' Saturday for thy sin?'

Hester's lips moved, but she did not speak; above their harsh voices she heard her baby crying, and only a vague regret passed through her mind that the pool was empty, else she might have plunged into its waters, and so hidden herself from the eyes of those who gathered round her.

'An' so nothin' but a young lord 'ull content 'ee? said Sally, standing with arms a-kimbo; 'an' you must wear your silk gownd out o' his pocket, and come arter un to disgrace un th' very day he comes whoam. Couldn't 'ee ha' bided a bit till he was a minded to go to thee?'

'Let a be,' said the farmer, thrusting Sally aside, who had stooped to pick up a stone and made as if she would throw it; 'did 'ee know th' woman up yon had drownded it, my lass?'

Hester shook her head; her misery was too pre-occupied and intense to be stabbed into keener suffering by pity than by taunts; but as her eyes for a second met his, the honest man as unhesitatingly espoused her cause, as he would have risked his life to drag a child out of danger.

'Ye could speak up fast eno' last night,' said the sexton's wife with a sneer, 'when you runned up to my lord an' pulled at his hand, an' called him by name as pat as you please, an' stood talking to him, jest as if them as stood by hadn't got no more eyes, nor ears, than th' stones in th' street!'

'An' you so much older than he, an' should ha'

knowed better,' said one of the women, in a gentler tone. 'He couldn't ha' been much more than a boy at his larning; an' now there's that brought to his door as 'll cling to un all his days.'

'M'appen that's why he's bided away so long,' said a farmer whose wife was present, and whose hard eye stifled his own relentings; 'an' the property goin' to wrack an' ruin; though if bein' sorry for a sin 'ud mend an estate, there's few in England as wouldn't be well manured from top to bottom.'

'Have ye got another baby there as you've a mind to drown?' cried Sally, pushing forward. 'You're hidin' somethin' under your shawl'—and before the farmer could stop her, she had roughly pulled it aside, and, dragging Hester's arms asunder, caused a shapeless something to roll from her arms to the ground.

Sally snatched it up with a cry of triumph; all who were near crowded round to look, as she displayed to their eyes a little well-worn baby's frock, and a tiny pair of shoes that had been worn, but never walked in.

A tear came to the eye of more than one present as she looked. 'Poor soul!' said the farmer softly; but when they turned with that new impulse of pity towards her she had disappeared, and none, not even Sally, could tell which direction she had taken.

'S'posin' she meets the young mistress,' said the smith's wife, aghast; 'master 'll be rare an' mad if any gossip gets to her while he's away. He'll bring us all to book for't when he comes back.'

And indeed by this time the penalty of talking gossip of any kind to the master's wife was well known—instant dismissal from his service within doors, stern deprivation of all favour or employment without.

'I han't glimpsed her nowhere's,' cried Sally, returning breathless: ''spect she's half way to Marmiton by this'n.'

But none heeded her.

''Tis himself!' cried one.

'What ails him?' cried another, all pushing away from the pool and towards Lord Lovel, who came swiftly down the lane, reaching the group almost before the words had escaped the speaker's lips.

'Is she here?' he said, glancing from one to another, too preoccupied by his fears to heed their looks or even utter the name of the woman whom he had come to seek.

'She just slipped away like a bit o' moonshine,' said the sexton's wife, ducking a curtsey, 'an' nobuddy saw where she went; but most like she'd be on her way to the gaol.'

'To the gaol?' said Frank, with a sudden look of relief, and made a step forward, but started back as, the crowd dividing, he found himself face to face with the pool, then pulled himself together, and disappeared almost as rapidly as Hester had done.

'Did ye see how cold-like he got as he looked at it?' said one in a whisper. 'He've got a good heart

so well as a handsome face, an' there's summut fine in the way he stands by her. "Hev' you see her?" says he, wi'out a blush, just as if she were nothin' to be ashamed on, an' off he goes arter her as quick as a swallow!'

'I'll not believe he's to blame,' said an old man, who had only just hobbled up, and leaned heavily on his stick; 'the Lovels was allus a sweet-blooded, clean-limbed lot, and there was never a word to th' discredit o' any one o' 'em, an' he's the very moral of his father, who died the day after his wife because a' couldn't live without her; so they was buried in one coffin, an' the age o' th' two o' 'em didn't count up to fifty.'

'It minds one of a purty old verse, as seems 'twas made a puppus for 'em,' said the blacksmith's wife:

'"Lady Nancy she died as it might be to-day,
Lord Lovel he died as to-morrow;
Lady Nancy she died out of pure, pure grief,
Lord Lovel he died out sorrow, sorrow,
Lord Lovel he died out of sorrow."'

'That ain't t' whole o't,' said the old man, and he repeated in a quavering voice:

'"And out o' her bosom there grew a red rose,
And out o' her lover's a briar, briar,
And out o' her lover's a briar."'

'Poor souls,' said the sexton's wife, 'but I'm thinking that when death calls up yon,' and she pointed towards the Hall, 'if so be he takes *her* first there'll be two to bury *there* 'stead o' one.'

'Ah! he *do* love her,' said another; 'tis only through her that you can strike at th' Squire's heart; but if ever she come to know all that lies to his door——'

'An' who'd dare to tell her?' said the farmer angrily; 'twould be a black-hearted man or woman as would do it, an' the Squire's steady enough now, an' makes her a deal better husband than one of them mealy-mouthed men, as goes to church regular, an' busts out when their wives ain't a-looking.'

'To be sure he's quiet enough now,' said Phillis, the village beauty, disdainfully, 'he don't seem to know there's a woman in th' world but th' mistress. I often think as you old folks remembers a sight o' things as never happened!'

'Ay,' said the old man, 'you're about right there, my lass; Mr. Eyre ha' forgot it all, an' so had best we; and arter all, 'tis things as happened thirty year ago that we mind best, not what happened as it might be yesterday, a bit ten or twelve year at the most.'

'To be sure,' said the blacksmith; 'now there's th' owd Squire, God rest his soul, p'raps he's gone by now, an' mebbe he wasn't sorry to go, he've had a pretty good spell at it, an' must ha' bin pretty well past th' old games by now—well, I mind as 'twas yesterday his wild doin's: if he fancied anythin', whether 'twas passon's daughter or the cowherd's maid, 'twas all one; a word in her ear, an' off she'd go, an' none could stop her.'

'Ay,' said the old man, with a chuckle of senile delight, 'but th' young Squire weren't far behind him. There was Comfrey Hazel now—her weddin' day was fixed, an' she seemed to like her jo well enough, when one mornin' the Squire stopped at her fayther's door, an' axed a drink o' milk. Out she come, as jimp a lass wi' as apple-bud a face as ever you see, an' handed him the mug wi' a hand all the whiter an' the sweeter for the curd she'd just been pressin'.

'"Will you go a ride wi' me, my dear?" said he, jest like that, an' she looks up, an' catches the glint o' his eye an' the smile o' his lip, an' her heart begins to beat, an' the red looks out o' her cheek, an' he puts out his hand, an' she puts hers in it, and her little foot on his'n, an' he swings her into the saddle afore him, an' off they goes, her own mother lookin' arter 'em as they went. They was galloping along at full speed, an' she were looking round at him wi' her little red mouth pressed to his'n, when close ahead o' 'em he saw a muck-cart wi' a man in it; 'twere too narrow a lane to pass it, an' the Squire were goin' too fast to stop o' a minute, so he just gripped Comfrey tight and set his mare at the cart, an' over she went like a bird, just touching the pipe in the man's mouth with her heels, the beauty! As the fellow stared, stupid-like, Comfrey looked over her shoulder an' saw 'twas her jo, an seeing him so foolish-like, and all covered with muck, she burst out larfin' at him, then put her hinny mouth up to the Squire's, an' "I'll go with you," sez she, an'

go she did, an' never come back; they call her Moll up to the great city now.'

'That's summat like a wooin',' said Phillis, her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving; 'I'd ha' gone wi' him, too, rather than ha' took he o' th' muck-cart.'

'You'd best stick to th' twenty shillin's a-week, and the dozen childer as is most like your lot,' said the sexton's wife dryly; 'but 'tis well for you there's none to tempt ye, not that you're handsome eno' to please an Eyre, neyther th' young Squire nor the old un ever thought none but a rare beauty worth sinnin' for.'

'Th' Squire's main bitter agen the poor soul up at the gaol,' said the blacksmith's wife; ''tis said he wrote a special to London to stop 'em from heeding the recommendation.'

'She were a pore thing,' said the sexton's wife, 'all the quality there to see her tried, an' she wi'out so much as a clean tucker on, an' to keep their washups up all one night 'cos the jury couldn't agree, an' yet not to do a bit o' credit as you may say to the proceedin's. O! a very pore figure of a woman indeed!'

'She'll cut a porer figure still at her hanging,' said the old man, 'for hang she will, if so be the Squire have made up his mind to't.'

By slow degrees the gossips had returned to the village street, where they now broke up into groups standing about at well-known corners, their budget of gossip augmented, not diminished, by the occurrences of the last half-hour.

Suddenly some one less busy than the rest descried a figure approaching, nay, close upon the group nearest the Hall, and a silence fell on it, and on the next, and the next, so that the whole street seemed to preserve an attitude of waiting, as Madcap advanced, looking at the gathered groups in wonder.

'Is anything the matter?' she said, glancing from one to another of the startled faces before her.

'We was talkin' about th' owd Squire,' said the quickest-witted woman, dropping a curtsey, 'an' hev you had any news of him yet, ma'am?'

Madcap told them that he was yet alive, and speaking a few words here and there, and calling each by name (for there was not a curly-headed child in the village but knew and loved her), she went her way.

''Tis like an angel passing by,' said one of the men in a low voice as he looked after her.

'Ah,' said another, 'what a shape, what a bloom, what a smile!'

'An' what a heart!' said the old man, 'that's th' best of all; what a heart!'

'An' what a voice!' said one of the women; 'it's just as if a bird was singing in her always; now it's low, now it's high, but always singing so as you can hear it.'

'It seems unnatural like to see her without the master,' said another, 'he be just her shadow, 'tain't in the Eyres neither; t' owd man couldn't a bide his wife, though he'd have liked her well enough if she'd

been his neighbour's—th' Eyres never did care about what was their own.'

'They *du* say that the young Lord were in love wi' the young mistress,' said the sexton's wife, 'an' how he stopped away these six year in foreign parts o' 'count o' her.'

'Mebbe 'twas for her sake he deserted th' poor soul we saw by now, an' in revenge she sent the child here by a hand she could trust—but th' pool bein' so near, an' the young lord away, th' woman drown'd it instead o' takin' it back agen,' said the sexton's wife softly.

'But it was hard on him to be met on his very threshold by a sin as he might well ha' forgotten,' said another of the women standing by.

'Ay, ay,' said the old man, 'sin's like kindlin' a fire or puttin' a seed i' th' ground—the fire won't allus stop for your tellin', an' th' seed sprouts an' grows an' ye dunno how many more o' its kind may spring from un—if our wrong-doin's 'ud only bide where we 'a planted un, there'd be a garden in ivery man's heart that hisself kept the key, and not God A'mighty.'

CHAPTER VIII.

'Wha has dune you wrang, fair maid,
And left you here alane?
Or wha has kissed your lovely lips,
That ye ca' Hazel-green?'

THE smithy by the brook in which the alder boughs dipped, stood dark and forsaken; if a stranger's horse

should cast a shoe in passing through the village that morning, he must e'en re-shoe it himself, for there would not be one found to lend a hand in aid.

And beyond the smithy it was more silent still, but the silence was of another sort, for here lay the coppice, that lovers' walk which of evenings was never without its rustic pair, but by day rested still as a cloister, with the flowers for nuns, and a bright-winged, angelic-tongued choir of birds for choristers.

Here you might see, side by side, the poplar, with its pale shimmering hue, and the fringed larches, tender green, mingling with the young beechen stems, that went arching and intertwining in a natural trellis overhead, their shining leaves just bursting from their yellow gloves, like young girls shyly emerging from their workday garb to don a glistening robe of silk.

Here, too, might be seen the pale sweet sunshine of the late tarrying primrose; and here, nestling close to the beechen roots, the wood-sorrel drooped her exquisite little head in endless replica towards the vividly green cup formed by her trefoil leaves, while hard by, the male fools orchis stood stiffly at arms, the ugly custodian of so much beauty.

'God has two dwellings,' said a divine: 'one in Heaven, and one in a contented heart;' and I think Madcap's heart was never so fit a dwelling, nor did it ever reach a higher beat of gratitude than in that moment, when, with a sudden vivid realisation of the perfect happiness of her life, she stood still in the midst

of the lovely alley and unconsciously stretched out her arms to the unseen Being who was the source of all.

Suddenly she swerved aside, as close at hand she heard a sound as must have carried comprehension with it, even to one who had never heard or dreamed of pain—the stifled desolate cry of a soul in extremest anguish, that believing itself alone with its God, calls upon Him by name for succour!

Madcap trembled—crime and despair had never in any shape approached her, and the language they used was unknown, yet she intuitively felt the depths of the pit in which yon lonely soul was struggling, and she was not of those who could stand looking on from the shore, and hear unmoved

'The bubbling cry
Of some strong swimmer in his agony.'

Close to the beechen roots by which she knelt, stood a pollard oak, whose sturdy body had shouldered away the undergrowth on either side, and also cleared for himself a space behind, as Madcap perceived, when softly pushing her way between the oak and the brambles, she saw into a little green interior which contained a woman, who lay with outstretched arms and face pressed downwards against the grass.

For a moment Madcap hesitated, then entered and knelt beside her; hesitated again, then laid her hand softly on that dark, uncovered head, trembling as beneath her touch the woman shrank violently away,

with the gesture of a creature that is at once desperate and dangerous in its helplessness.

Madcap drew back. She clasped her hands together, and great, slow tears, born of intense pity, rose to her eyes; in a moment she seemed to realise the gulf that lay between her own happy life and this miserable one to which even pity came as a cruelty, not a solace.

For a minute the woman lay motionless, then, like a startled animal that turns with shy gaze to see if it be still pursued, she half looked up, making a screen of her hands, and caught that lovely look of pity bent on her. 'Who are you?' she said, in a whisper. 'You are not one of those that shrieked at me by the pool . . . '

'A woman and a sister,' said Madcap, with all her heart, and as she spoke Hester leaned a little forward, as one who listens, yet thinks her ears have played her false, then slowly looked up to see what manner of woman was this who claimed sisterhood with such as she.

For a minute the two faces gazed intently at each other—the one, beautiful through all its haggardness and anguish, of olive tint framed in masses of blue-black hair, with eyes

> 'Deeper than the depth
> Of waters still'd at even;'

the other so young, so pitiful, so pure. . . . I think that a new world opened to each as she looked, and the contrast of their lives was brought more

keenly home than it could have been by a life-time of words or familiar knowledge.

'I wanted to be alone,' said Hester, with that certainty of her story being known to her hearer that is one of the strongest signs of absorbing misery. 'I could not breathe in my little room, and so I came out. . . . I'm trying to forgive her . . . but I can't . . . I can't . . . the little baby comes between, and it cries, and drowns her voice in my ears . . . but I must get used to it—to what she had done—before I see her again . . . .'

'Some one has hurt your child?' said Madcap gently.

Hester looked up, a spasm convulsed her throat, for a moment she could not speak, then, 'It's dead,' she said abruptly.

'Oh, poor soul! poor soul!' cried Madcap, all the mother-heart in her crying out in passionate pity, and drew that miserable head to her breast, and held it there—pure woman and sinning one meeting on the ground of common motherhood, with but one pulse of sorrow between them.

'But it has been yours,' said Madcap, as for a moment the woman clung to her as one to whom such clinging is new and sweet. 'Nothing can take that joy from you . . . it has lain in your arms; it has loved you . . . you have loved it. . . .'

'I *did* love it,' said the woman, almost in a whisper; 'its little ways laid fast hold on my heart, though I did not know it . . . . as Janet said, they came back

on me afterwards like a tune of music, that you don't heed much at the time, but just drops into your mind bit by bit afterwards . . . . but I was proud, and I wouldn't let her see that I loved it . . . . I'd send her away for hours together that I might take care of it myself . . . . and it got to know me, and would smile up in my face just as if I was as good as any other mother; but when Janet asked if she might take it to her home for a bit, I let it go.'

She paused a moment, shuddered away from Madcap, then went on again: 'I wrote to her that very night to come back . . . . but the days passed and she didn't come . . . . and I was too proud to go after her to fetch it, especially when any day or hour now I might hear Janet's step on the path, and one night at dark I heard it and ran out. . . .

'Think of it,' she cried, her eyes seeking Madcap's with a despairing hunger in their depths. 'One moment to have your child in your mind *alive* as you have always known it; for your heart to leap up as at the sound of its coming—to feel it but a hand's-breadth away, to run to it, to be met with empty arms and one little word—*dead!* Nothing warm, living, *real*, that you could clasp to your breast, but a name, a nothing—a word behind which his living body is hid—*dead!* She took me to a grave and said it was his . . . . dead—dead—but I never went there again; it was my living child that I remembered—that I wanted—not my dead one!'

She covered her face with her hands as at that moment a bird overhead commenced to sing—and there are moments when a snatch of song will paint to a poor wretch her misery in such colours as neither feeling nor thought have ever had power to paint it for her yet.

'And was there no one to be kind to you?' cried Madcap, the mother-heart in her throbbing passionate response to this bereft woman's misery. 'Your husband, even if he did not love it—some men do not love children—could not he comfort you?'

'My husband!' repeated Hester, shrinking away, a scarlet flush overspreading her pale face. 'I thought you knew . . . . I have no husband. . . .' A hard look overspread her features, and the shame in her eyes seemed to draw a momentary veil between the two hearts that pity had so closely drawn together.

A moment—no more—and Madcap, remembering only that here was one who had been a mother and was childless, leaned forward, and stealing a gentle arm round that bowed neck, kissed the poor lost woman on the cheek with a kiss as warm—as real, as though in blood, heart, and life they had been sisters indeed.

For a moment Hester did not speak; then, seizing Madcap's hand, she bowed her head upon it, and burst into the first tears she had shed for years—such tears as spring from that fountain 'whose home and source is the bosom of God. . . .'

'Are there many in the world like you?' she said, looking up. 'If so, it is no wonder men leave women like me. . . .'

'Try to tell me,' said Madcap gently; 'you have suffered so much. God will forgive you. . . .'

'I loved him,' said Hester in a whisper; 'he didn't deceive me; he never said that he would marry me. . . .'

She pressed her hand against the throat, whose workings for a while prevented speech, then cried out as one from whose crushed heart a spark of rebellion is painfully struck:

'God sells us love at the price of cruel tortures: man, the world, chance, nature—all are against us, and for each happy hour we pay with years of anguish . . . . and I was happy. . . . I'd sin and suffer it all over again to be as happy as I was then . . . . though I did not even know if the name I called him by was his own, or where he went when he left me alone, as he often did. Sometimes it would come to me, like the grip of a cold hand on my heart, that one day he would kiss me for the last time, and I not know it—till after. He'd been gone from me a month, the longest time he'd ever stopped away, and I'd just made up my mind to tell him something I'd known a long time, but feared to tell him, for he hated anything that interfered with my love for him . . . . when I heard his step, and my heart dried up in my bosom, for something told me that he'd come to say just one

word—Good-bye. And he said it; standing before me with a look that went past me, for he saw only the other woman beyond—he spoke of the money he had settled on me—all as if I were miles away . . . . I who had been so near to him as it might be yesterday. And however honest she might be, she could be no more honest than I was when he met me first—the world might count me bad, but he knew better than that, and she could love him no more faithfully than I did . . . . I think the one poor kiss that I coveted, but was too proud to beg for, wouldn't have harmed *her* if she had been as good a woman as you are . . . . and my baby was born upon his father's wedding-day.'

'And did he know?' cried Madcap, her heart on fire with pity for the woman, with condemnation for the man.

'Who was to tell him?' said Hester. 'My father never knew with whom I had fled, nor did Janet, my foster-sister. To her—when she came at my summons I told nothing, fearing that her wild love for me would impel her to some lawless deed of vengeance upon *him* . . . . and it did, only the punishment fell upon me. . . .'

'And so he never knew,' said Madcap, looking straight before her; 'and perhaps she believes him to be good, and loves him. . . .'

'Men like him are always loved,' said Hester. 'I heard of her once. She was young—little more than

a child. I think she must be something like you; and her hair had sunbeams in it, they said. . . .'

'You are better than I am,' cried Madcap, her hands clasped tightly together, her grey eyes flashing. 'I should hate her; I think I should wish to make her suffer too. . . .'

'She couldn't have harmed me but for my own sin,' said Hester sadly; 'and I swore to his friend that I wouldn't harm her, or tell her; and I kept my word. When he begged and prayed with me never to let that knowledge darken her life, something good seemed to come into my soul. I said to myself, "I'm a wicked woman, but I'll do as much for her as a good one could have done, and I won't break her heart." Only when I thought she might have got children like him, I felt to hate her . . . . Hark?' she cried suddenly, 'don't you hear children's voices? They're coming this way!' and she sprang to her feet, a great light of eagerness and love breaking out on her features. 'Perhaps—perhaps one of them may be like what my little baby would have been if he had lived to grow up . . . . I've looked for him so long,' she added wistfully, 'all the world over, I think; but I'd never found anything like him yet. . . .'

She parted the boughs and looked out. Dody and Doune came dancing through the shadows hand in hand, their voices preceding them as they came. Doune was impressing on Dody that the latter did not understand riddles, and therefore was not competent

to propose one to their mother ; but Dody maintained a contrary opinion, and pleaded to be given a trial. 'Though to be sure,' he added, with a shout of glee, 'mummy 'll *never* guess it !'

Suddenly the boughs were thrust aside, and Hester, stepping out, ran to the startled children, and down she fell on her knees before one of them, and hugged him all up together to her breast, then put him from her, gazing wildly on his features, then pushed the clustering hair from his brow, and caught one of his little hands and twined it round her neck, then dropped her brow on his soft neck. 'My child,' she cried in a voice of rapture, 'it's my child come back to me from the dead !'

Dody stretched his arms towards Madcap. 'Mamma!' he said, scared by Hester's wild look and feverish clutch ; she loosed him and looked up, a gleam as of Heaven shining athwart her face. 'Do you hear ?' she said ; 'it was not my baby that Janet drowned in the pool—eyes, lips, hair, all are my child's ; she told me a lie, but I'll forgive her, and he knows his mother. . . .'

'Mummy,' cried Dody, once more struggling to escape, while Madcap, fearing to permit the illusion to continue, yet dreading to awaken her from it, knelt down beside the poor distraught woman and said :

'It is not your little baby—but you shall love him as you will . . . . and he will love you. . . .'

Over Hester's face a chill look of awakening came

—slowly her arm relaxed, and Dody ran to and clutched his mother's neck, while with his little soft hand he patted her cheek and kissed her fondly. 'Mummy,' he said, '*dear* mummy. . . .'

'He calls you mother, too,' said Hester slowly; 'but he is mine, mine—speak, or I shall go mad,' she cried, seizing Madcap's arm; 'is he not mine?'

'No,' said Madcap gently; 'he is my child—it is a chance resemblance that has misled you.'

'A chance resemblance!' cried Hester in a terrible tone; 'he is either my child or my child's brother . . . and you are his mother? Oh! it is impossible . . . . he is mine, I say. And who are you—what are you—that you say you are *his mother?*'

For a moment her eyes seemed flames that drank up Madcap's tears of pity—'His father then—is—must be . . . .'

'My husband is Mr. Eyre,' said Madcap, feeling as though Hester's eyes beckoned her over a hideous precipice, at whose base life, love and happiness must needs be shattered for evermore.

Neither had perceived Frank approaching with steps that devoured the distance, but at this moment he reached them, and seizing Hester by the arm, lifted her from the ground, and without a word, dragged her away.

'Poor 'ooman,' said Dody, looking after them; 'I hope he won't hurt her. Wonder if that's the one daddy punished the other day, eh, mummy?'

'Mother,' said Doune, returning from a prolonged chase after a yellow butterfly, 'we've got a riddle to ask you: "What's a cat got, *no* other animal's got?"'

'Not none,' cried Dody, dancing about with delight. 'Oh, she'll never guess it, not never!'

Their voices pierced her heart; she looked down at the two little upturned faces without a word; she seemed to see three, not two, and the father of all three was—was——

'She can't guess it,' said Dody's voice, sounding in her ears as from a great way off, 'don't you see how hard she is trying, and she *can't?* Why, mummy dear, *kittens*, to be sure!'

CHAPTER IX.

'I want to take up my cross and follow the true Christ.—Humanity, to accept the facts as they are, however bitter or severe—to be a student and a lover, but never a lawgiver.'

'MUMMY'S falleded asleep!' said Dody in a tone of awe, as Madcap sank to the ground, and lay, with closed eyes, against a clump of wood-sorrel no whiter than the face it partly hid: 'Mustn't wake her up, eh, Doony?'

'Of course not,' said Doune, with decision; and a bee-moth sailing by at that moment, the two boys instantly gave chase, and were led such a dance after it over hill and dale that they did not once think of their mother for a full hour. Madcap lay so still that

a bird hopped upon her shoulder, and a butterfly rested for a moment in a stray sunbeam on her hair; her ears were as dull to the distant shouts of the children as to the footsteps then approaching her, and beneath Frank's eyes she rested unconsciously as though she were indeed wrapped in that slumber which knows no waking.

So would she look, he thought, when—when—with a groan he covered his face, for he knew that Madcap was not of those who could live on with all her idols shattered around her.

He folded his arms on his breast, and all the love and longing of a lifetime—all the bitter scorn and hatred of the long-buried sin that had reached forth its lean talon as from the grave, to destroy the innocent, burned in his blue eyes as he stood looking down upon the still face, whose rounded beauty had taken new curves of nobility, that, alas! come suddenly to no human countenance save by the touch of death or the bitter pangs of heart-break. He would not awaken her—let her sleep on; ay, he almost wished for ever—for it could not be Madcap who would struggle back to life; Madcap, whose step was music and whose glance was sunshine—the fulness of whose woman's life was grounded in the truth and honour of the man she loved . . . . how many years ago was it that he had seen her tripping over the cowslips' heads, a child playing with her children? There had come to his mind, as he looked at her, some verses that had surely been written for her, and her alone:

'O zun, mëake the gil' cups all glitter
In goold all around her;
And mëake o' the dëaisy's white flowers
A bed in the spring.

'O light-rollèn wind, blow me hither
The väice of her talkèn,
Or bring vrom her feet the light doust
She do tread in the spring.'

He shivered in the warm air as she stirred, and sighed. What was he going to say to her?—how should he meet her eyes? he asked himself, as with a long gasping breath she lifted herself, and gazed around.

I suppose that two drowning friends, shipwrecked from different points of the compass, and for a moment tossed up by the waters face to face with one another, do not in that moment either feel or express amazement or gladness at the meeting; and to Madcap it was not strange that Frank should be here—with the old resistless impulse of affection towards him that had never left her, she stretched out her hands, crying, 'Oh, Frank! . . . . Frank! . . . . .'

'Madcap!' he said, just as simply, and kneeled down beside her; and so, for a minute, they looked in each other's pale faces, and then a sob broke from one of them: but it was not Madcap.

'Why are you so sorry?' she said, her hand lying cold and still in his. 'Then it is true. . . . . I was not quite sure. . . . . there are so many men in the

world . . . . . but now I know . . . . . and you must not be sorry for me—but for her.'

She drew her hand away and put it to her head, trying to remember. 'Something came to my mind as my senses were slipping away,' she said. '*All love is lost save upon God alone* . . . . That was it. It was a strange thought to come into my head, was it not? I have been very happy . . . .' She looked up wistfully at Frank, but his eyes were bent on the ground as he stood before her.

'I always said that I should die young,' she went on, in a voice as like her own as a whitethroat's song is to a blackbird's, 'and I was sorry . . . . but that was nothing. And so he stayed away so long, because . . . . because . . . . and that is why he did not ask me before he went . . . . and Lady Betty was right . . . . and . . . . and no doubt he loved her once,' she added, below her breath, shaken out of her torpor by a sharp headlong spasm of that jealousy whose fierce pain makes a woman humble, and shows her to her own heart helpless at the feet of her master.

'You love him, Madcap?' cried Frank, as one who speaks against his will.

She dropped her head on her hands. 'Love him?' Ay, she loved yet—love as we *must* love, as we *do* love for evil as for good, and the deeper the sin, so it be not against ourselves, the more closely we cling to the sinner . . . . we loved him in his honour—shall we thrust him from us in his shame? But to the

woman who has always looked up, that moment is a terrible one when she sees her other self laid in the dust, and realises that henceforth she must love him, not for that better part that might live for ever, but as a human living clod that, even while she clings to it, may be resolved into nothing, and so escape her.

'But I will give him back to her,' she said, scarcely above a whisper; 'I will learn to live without him . . . . Only I must get away before he comes back . . . . and you will help me, Frank . . . . she will forgive me, perhaps, when she knows that I suffer too.'

How strong in the thought, how powerless in the action, is this same *will* that does not take into account human flesh and blood, habit, duty, nothing that we know and hold on by! Even in that moment of renunciation, human feeling gripped Madcap fast, and asked what life would be without him? Love cried out that it starved, and would be fed! the shadow of sin cleared from that beloved face, and left only *him*—that indestructible something that she loved. She said to herself that she would be dumb, deaf, blind, imbecile; but to his side she must creep and cling . . . . the man's wrongdoings seemed far away, the man most near in that moment of strong impulse towards him.

'Why do you not speak for him?' she said, looking up with some of the old Madcap fire kindling in her eye. 'You loved him once . . . . and he loved you

too . . . . though he was dishonest to you . . . . but I made him that . . . . he would have spoken for *you* —he would have told me not to believe it. . . .'

Frank turned suddenly, and across his brain there flashed one of those wild ideas that have stamped a man ere now as hero or madman—a moment, and he had adopted it as one of those forlorn hopes that, by splendid courage or audacity, have now and again been pushed to a victory that has reversed every law of likelihood. He drew his breath hard, and said :

'You have been very happy, Madcap, and, please God, you shall be happy still. My dishonour will not break your heart : and it was not a very long misery for you after all . . . .' for a moment he took her little cold hand in his, then loosed it, and stood apart.

'Poor Frank,' she said, with the ghost of a wan smile, 'you would make me happy if you could. I think you would even give your life for me ; but you cannot give me this, dear . . . . no one, not even *he*, can make me happy now.'

'Can I not?' he said ; and moved yet a little farther away. 'But at least, Madcap, I can tell you' —he paused, and went paler than she—'the truth.'

'No,' she cried, her face flaming up ; 'that is his affair, not yours.'

'No,' he said, and in the ring of his voice there was less of entreaty than command ; 'it is mine.'

Madcap looked up ; this was a new Frank who stood

before her—no boyish sweetheart, dependent on her will, but a man as strong to love, ay, and to sin maybe, as Mr. Eyre himself.

'Madcap,' he said, and his voice was as one who spoke by rote, 'there are other men in the world besides Mr. Eyre. . . . . Can't you think that it might be some one you know . . . . some one you called your friend? . . . .'

Madcap's arms fell to her sides, she hardly seemed to breathe as she gazed at him; then, like a shipwrecked mariner, who at the eleventh hour sights land, she flung them high above her head, and 'It was *Barrington* Eyre!' she said.

For a moment there was a dead silence, broken only by the shrill whisper of the grasshopper-lark in the meadow hard by; then:

'It was not Barrington.'

Something in his face struck her; she seized his arm, and looked up in his face, feeling herself violently snatched back from the verge of so awful a joy as brain and heart might not well endure.

'Oh! Frank, Frank . . . . it was *you?*'

He looked down on her without a word. His sweet little Madcap, who had vexed his heart full sore, but who had never worn any but kind looks for him yet—to whom he had never lied . . . . if ever he had had any poor hope of shining in her eyes by his constancy, by his long faithfulness, this was the end of it . . . . this was the end. . . .

'It was a boyish infatuation,' he said, pushing resolutely on, since in movement only was there safety, and a moment's pause might bring defeat. 'She was years older than I; it was a man's folly that you cannot be expected to understand,' he went on, almost harshly; 'and for God's sake, Madcap, spare me the recital of it.'

'A folly,' said Madcap, into whose heart every word of Hester's had cut deep; 'you call it that .... Frank, you promised me that I should be happy .... are you telling me a lie?'

'Ask the village,' he said, 'the whole county even—they will tell you if I have lied or no.'

'But the resemblance,' she cried, with no blush of shame—in the supreme issues of life the bastard emotion finds no place—'the resemblance to her own child that she saw in mine.'

'She is almost insane on that point,' he said, 'and beholds a fancied image in all she looks on.'

'But she spoke of my wedding-day,' said Madcap swiftly.

'When I—broke with her,' said Frank, still in that hard monotonous voice, 'I told her that I was going to be married; she must have found out your name, and thought that you had married me—not Mr. Eyre.'

Madcap fell on her knees, covering her eyes.

'I can't take it,' she said, 'this great happiness .... it is as if I had stepped over your dead body to get it back again .... husband .... dear love ....

forgive, forgive me . . . .' she whispered in a low cry whose intensity bore the weight of a prayer and a blessing in one. She had forgotten Frank, who stood at a little distance, looking down on that half-hidden face upon whose mouth a smile had

> 'Waxed too holy,
> And left the lips praying. . . .'

Suddenly she looked up and saw him standing apart—downcast, pale, but with so much nobility and bravery in his face as ill-befitted the character he just then filled. . . .

Frank—who had never lied to her—whom she had never known but as her faithful friend and sweetheart . . . . after all these years to come back and stand face to face with her thus. . . .

She passed her hand across her brow, looked at him, then away, then back again, crying out from her very heart, for her own happiness made her pitiful, 'Oh, Frank—Frank——'

He knew all the questions contained in that cry, and stood silent beneath it, motionless as a craven image of despair.

She had come close to him ; he felt as though he were a wretch thrust out into hell, and yet able to look up at the starlit skies of Heaven, as he slowly lifted his eyes to her face, on which was a great light of pity and trembling joy.

'Frank,' she said, and he turned suddenly towards her, wishing that this moment, in which she looked

and spoke so kindly, might last for ever, 'you were so young then—you did not know—but now you will repair the wrong you did her . . . . she has suffered so much . . . . and she loved you.'

'What do you wish of me, Madcap?' he said.

'You will make her your wife;' and she took one of his hands between both her own; 'and we will love you, he and I, better than ever.'

'You know not what you ask, Madcap,' he said sadly; 'it is impossible—women do not understand about such things.'

Somehow as she looked at him then, she realised that a man may truly love a woman, yet have another side to his character, of which she knows nothing . . . . and his likeness changed in her eyes as she looked, and grew hateful to her—some jealousy perhaps, mingled with her scorn, as she cried—

'No! they can only suffer . . . . God does not let them die . . . . and man will not let them understand . . . . and so you have been bad all through—a coward and a traitor to both her and me. . . . If you had had a grain of manliness in you, you would have told me the truth before her, and not given me half-an-hour of such agony as a lifetime of happiness could never wash away the memory of!'

'Half-an-hour,' he said; 'it is a long time . . . . yet some miseries last a lifetime.'

'As hers must,' she said, with a scorn that showed how the stone was rolled away from her heart, and the

spirit elastic, and unbruised as ever, within her. 'But at least I will go to her; I will tell her that I did not wrong her, as she thought . . . . perhaps she will forgive me then.'

'She bade me tell you that she would not see you,' said Frank slowly. 'It will be unwise in you to make any such attempt.'

'Are you my keeper?' she said, her eyes flashing; then trembled, thinking of how near this woman and she had been to each other an hour ago . . . . and, passing Frank by as if he had been her lackey, went proudly away, till pride gave place to sorrow, and that in its turn to joy; so that unconsciously to herself she danced along the last few steps of the coppice like a maiden hurrying to the tryst.

'She did not suffer long,' said Frank aloud, when the last white fold of her gown had vanished; 'it was quickly over; and I will take care of the rest.'

CHAPTER X.

'My thoughtless youth was wing'd with vain desires,
My manhood oft misled by wandering fires.'

EARLY on the Friday morning Mr. Eyre's father had another seizure, and his death was hourly expected throughout the day.

Mr. Eyre nevertheless concluded his letter to Madcap, and posted it himself, after which he returned to

take his place by his father's side—a place which the be-ribboned one had yielded since she had realised that it would not be in the old man's power, even if he had the will, to confer any further benefits upon her.

Death! Mr. Eyre had faced it often, and had no fear of it—but he had never before been compelled to watch the slow tightening of the grisly hand on its prey, and he turned from the sight impatiently, as he would have done from that of a boa constrictor swallowing a rabbit—a disagreeable sight, however necessary. Probably there is no sight on earth more painful than the death of an old, unloved, depraved person . . . . the very incapacity to feel sorrow makes the onlooker's heart but the bitterer and harder; while the death of a little child, that is too young even to lisp out its mother's name, may lift that same heart to an agony of pain that will teach it the divinest lesson it shall ever learn.

There it lies—at once our pain, our punishment, and our joy . . . . all that we might have been, all that we can never be, we seem to see in the little flickering life before us . . . . . in that tiny hand lie possibilities that were once our own, and that one by one we have missed or flung away, and between him and us come a thousand subtle, vivid suggestions that never pass betwixt us and other faces that we love. . . . We cannot see God's hand, but a hushed, yearning fear is upon us, and we dare not rail against Him, or

cry aloud as we hold upon our knees the little shape that has never sinned nor struggled, never vexed our hearts, or needed to beg our forgiveness. . . . . As the cry rises involuntarily that we may be permitted to give our own life for the child, midway the answer silences it. 'Yours is little—his so much!' and the prayer changes on our lips to one for ourselves, we being so much more in need of prayer than he. And so he remains to us all our lives long the might-have-been of our tears—the little snowy sail set to the ocean of eternity, that has reached alone an anchorage that the most eager of us may never hope to win, and the spot in our heart that baby hand has touched remains ever vital, while that memory may hold us back from sin, and influence us for good to our dying day.

But by the death-bed of such an one as old Mr. Eyre we feel scant impulse to pray. His deeds have gone before, and our words follow in mockery—here are no potentialities for good, but realities of accomplished evil, and we shrink from importuning God for this man, who never dreamed of importuning Him for himself.

But to his son this ghastly, unconscious face was more pregnant of meaning than that of any child could have been, for here was that unmistakable might-have-been to which his own life had pointed till Madcap had come to him to prove how

> 'Men may rise on stepping stones,
> Of their dead selves to higher things,'

for to this, or a violent death standing, was the end to which most of the Eyres came. It seemed their lot to live a *vie orageuse*, and die before the cup of life was drunk to the last dregs; while with Byron might each of them have exclaimed, 'I will work the mine of my youth to the last vein of the ore, and then—good night—I have lived, and I am content.'

Haughty, brilliant, with a dark peculiar beauty as coveted by men as it was dangerous to women, the Eyres for the last hundred years had been an enigma to the world, and perhaps to themselves; yet though their deeds were eccentric to the verge of madness, none could point to a single instance of insanity in the family, and as time went on, the world gave up wondering, and accepted the Eyres as a race of beings too distinct from ordinary human beings to be judged by the canons that ruled mankind.

There had been a time when they differed in no way from their neighbours, by whom they were respected as folks not too clever to make other people look foolish nor yet too virtuous to grudge a pleasant vice or two to those who could afford them; but with the advent of a certain Lady Sara Villiers in the family, both the fortunes and character of the Eyre family underwent a striking change.

Her sons grew up wild and turbulent as young hawks reared in a dove's nest, perplexing their quiet father by their lawless ways; but when it was discovered that their eccentricity at home took the

shape of extraordinary mental ability at school and college, their mother gloried in them and their successes more than ever, and would tell her husband how this marked increase of intellectual power in the Eyre family had come to it solely through herself. And then it is said he would shake his head, and tell her significantly that the line that divides the man of genius from the madman is thin as a hair, and he would whisper something in her ear at which she would turn pale, and later on unlock from a secret drawer a letter that she knew by heart.

Her portrait hangs in the west gallery of the Hall —a brilliant gipsy face with dark mocking eyes, and a little scarlet mouth in which pride and determination lurk ; and so vividly was her dark beauty reproduced in her sons and their children after them, that in the county the resemblance of father to son in the Eyre family gradually passed into a proverb.

There was, too, a strong similarity of character henceforth in the whole race ; it was as though the force, whether for good or evil, that manifested itself in them wrote itself as indelibly on their minds as on their faces, so that what the father had been it was safe to foretell the son would be; and up to the present time, with one exception only, this had invariably proved to be the case.

Lady Sara lived to weep bitter tears of shame, and see her pride laid in the dust, and a portrait of him who laid it there hangs beside her on the wall—a slim

young fellow, whose dark face is a masculine copy of her own, but with more heart in the eyes, and something of the keen intellectual glance that distinguished Madcap's husband, the present master of the Hall.

He was Lady Sara's favourite grandson, and his successes at college had been so brilliant as to cause a certain great man to single him out for his especial consideration, and even to express an intention of bringing him forward in public life at the earliest possible opportunity.

Brandon, covered with honours and excited by his hopes, retired in company with half-a-dozen of his friends to the Hall, there to indulge in those amusements that, with the Eyres, invariably alternated with periods of absorbing study and intensest application. On this occasion a great deal of high-play and drinking went forward, till the young host, proverbially unlucky at games of chance, had lost a larger sum of money than he could possibly repay to Musgrave, a man unpopular with the rest for more reasons than one; and on a certain night Musgrave won more heavily than usual, his pocket-book scarcely containing the bank-notes he crammed into it, together with an I O U from Brandon for a thousand pounds.

The poor lad—he was but little more—on passing Musgrave's room that night, and hearing himself called, paused to exchange a few words with his guest, who in his presence put the notes away in an escritoire near his bed, and Brandon noted with un-

conscious accuracy that it was the fourth drawer, and also the shape of the handle, which was different to that of the others; and so, brooding heavily on his losses, he went his way.

Next morning, as they sat at breakfast, Musgrave, as if by accident, pulled out his pocket-book, then made a sudden exclamation that drew all eyes upon him. 'Good God!' he cried, 'I am robbed. The notes are gone!'

'Impossible,' said Brandon, rousing himself. 'Why, man, I saw you with my own eyes place them in the escritoire last night—the fourth drawer, I think. I remember noticing the handle.'

'Did I?' said Musgrave, affecting to look puzzled. 'I really forget. If you remember the drawer and I don't, will you do me the kindness, my dear fellow, to fetch them for me?'

'To be sure,' said Brandon, too pre-occupied by his anxieties to think of the oddness of the request; and he left the room at once, closing the door behind him.

'That's a cool thing,' said one of the men, 'to send your host on a lackey's errand. I suppose you thought that, being your host, he could not well refuse?'

But Musgrave said not a word, only sat watching the shut door, and counting the seconds to Brandon's return.

He had not long to wait. Brandon came in wearily and sat down empty-handed.

'You gave me a wild-goose chase, Musgrave,' he

said ; 'the drawer was empty—you must have changed them to some other place. Besides—I remember now —the notes were in the pocket-book when you put them away.'

'Then I must abide by the loss of my money,' said Musgrave, in so strange a tone that all present looked at him in wonder.

'Prove your loss,' said Brandon haughtily. 'This is the first time a guest's money has been missing or stolen in this house, and if the notes are not found I pledge my honour their value shall be restored to you. Gentlemen, will you come with me and help to conduct the search ?'

He turned about lightly, and they all followed him ; but though they ransacked every nook and corner in Musgrave's room from the chimney downwards, the money was not found ; and the strange look on Musgrave's face became more marked as, himself idle, he looked on at the useless toil of the searchers.

His expression was not lost upon Brandon, and as soon as the search was abandoned he said : 'Gentlemen, the next room to be searched will be my own.' But at this Musgrave sprang forward, and seized Brandon by the arm to hold him back.

'No !' he cried, 'the matter shall go no farther ; it was a hoax, a stupid practical joke of my own.'

'Your jest was a sorry one,' said Brandon coldly, as he shook himself free, while from the men around burst forth expressions of contempt, anger, and dis-

gust: 'but, such as it is, I shall not consider it complete without a sight of the notes that have given us so much useless trouble, and you so much amusement at our expense.'

'The notes are my own,' said Musgrave sullenly. 'I decline for more reasons than one,'—and a meaning glance at Brandon shot from his eyes,—'to produce them.'

'You have them on your person?' said Brandon quietly.

'No.'

'Then, gentlemen,' said Brandon, 'we will continue the search;' and he led them straight to his own room.

'His fate be on his own head,' said Musgrave to himself, as he followed, and, standing in the doorway, heard a low groan escape one of the searchers, who stood as though turned to stone, looking at a bundle of notes he held in his hand.

They had all gathered round him in a moment, and it was Brandon's hand that took the notes and his own I O U from his friend, and held them up to Musgrave, who stood beyond.

'Is this the other half of your cursed practical joke?' he said between his teeth. 'Before God, if you were not my guest, I would strike you across the mouth for the dog that you are; as it is, I bid you begone with your gains, and never again darken my doors!'

As he spoke he crushed the notes together into a ball, and flung it at Musgrave, who let it lie, only a bad black look gathered about his lips and eyes, as he said slowly—'If a practical joke has been perpetrated, you should know more of it than I.'

'By Heaven!' thundered out the young fellow, 'I'll get to the bottom of this; and, if you won't speak out here before these men, I'll force you to speak elsewhere at the sword's point.'

To which Musgrave said sullenly, 'You have drawn your fate down on your own head. With my own eyes, I saw you take these notes from my room and place them in the drawer, from which Sefton, in the presence of us all, took them.'

'You lie!' cried Brandon, his beautiful face ablaze with scorn and anger. 'From the moment I saw you put the pocket-book away last night to that in which Sefton found them here, I have never set eyes on, or touched your cursed money. When we Eyres play practical jokes we are not in the habit of doing so with our guests' gold.'

'You came into my room at daybreak,' said Musgrave, quite unmoved; 'I saw you take the notes from the pocket-book, which you replaced in the drawer, and I got up and followed you to your own room, where you put the notes away, I watching you from the door. I drew back as you shut and locked it; across that threshold, I take my oath, I have never stepped. I was already in the dining-room when you

came down to breakfast; my reason for asking you to fetch them was that you might have the opportunity of replacing them.'

'You lie!' said Brandon again; but this time his voice was strange even in his own ears. He looked at the faces of those who stood around, and at what he saw there his own grew pale as that of the dead.

'Gentlemen,' he said, pointing to Musgrave, 'do you believe him or me?'

But they answered him not a word—only Sefton came to his friend, and stood beside him.

'Then,' said Brandon, and swift as thought, before any could hinder him, snatched from the wall one of the loaded pistols that always hung there, 'since you believe it to be so, here perishes the first—the last thief of the house of Eyre!'

A report rang out—he made a step forward, shivered all over from head to heel, then fell at their feet—dead!

In the public inquiry that was held on his death the whole story became known, and the black flag of disgrace was unfurled above the house of Eyre for ever; but Lady Sara raved and wept, and swore that it could all be explained; only the explanation never came, and to this day Brandon Eyre remains in the eyes of the world the first, last thief of the house of Eyre.

After this there came a harder devilry into their deeds; as their pride increased, their self-respect diminished, and the women of the family being per-

mitted little or no influence over their fiery husbands and sons, the latter went on their way unchecked—at war with God, their own hearts, and the world.

Alike lovely and unhappy (for no Eyre thought a woman worth the winning who was not unsurpassable of her kind, and whether she loved him or no, it was all one—his passions once lit carried all before him, and marry him she should, if only to repent at her leisure), these women lived simple, anxious lives, only too thankful if open scandal were avoided, and their dead brought home to them to receive decent burial at their hands.

And the old Squire had been wild and lawless even beyond the common wont of the Eyres, and had trained up his sons to walk in his steps, so that as mere lads they had bid fair to outdo their father in his devilry and misdeeds.

'At sixteen a youth cannot help himself, nor at twenty, nor perhaps at thirty,' says Taine; and at thirty-five years of age Barrington Eyre assuredly could not help himself, nor to all appearance could his brother, since some of their worst follies were perpetrated after that age.

But between the two men lay a difference as of alien blood; while Barrington was born to become the slave of habit, his brother was made to be its master, by a single effort of will shaking himself as free of the chains that bound him as if they had been reeds that in sport he had permitted to be twined about him.

Abruptly as with the stroke of a sword his marriage had cut his life sharply in twain—the one half he threw behind him, wasting neither thought nor regret on what was irrevocable; the other, honourable and of good repute, he lived in the eyes of all men, devoting himself in his early middle age to those quiet persistent joys and duties that his youth had been spent in defiance of. The mad reckless era of the Eyres had gone by, and a new honourable one begun, said his neighbours, as years passed, and no breath of scandal attached itself to Mr. Eyre, who exerted an ascendency over all with whom he came in contact, which proved him to possess that conjuring or masterful quality of the human mind that Goëthe in one brief word sums up as '*das damonische*,' and that never permits its possessor to remain in the background of events, but sets him in the van of every battle, a born leader whom man will follow blindly into the very jaws of death itself. And this force within him working since his marriage in the direction of good, not evil, Mr. Eyre came to be possessed of perhaps the truest riches that earth can afford—the unenforced respect of those among whom he dwelt; and upon his look and word men waited—of what he did nothing was lost, or viewed with the indifference often accorded to better deeds than his, and in very truth was to those around him—

'The tongue of the trump to them a'.'

For the fame that in quite early youth he had won in

the world of letters he felt and expressed a most profound contempt. Now and again, at long intervals, he would put forth from his retreat some rare bit of work that drew all cultured eyes upon him, but to all entreaties that he would boldly enter that arena in which his splendid abilities might pit him successfully against the foremost men of his time he turned a deaf ear. Accused of idleness, he once remarked that his intellect was for his own enjoyment and those immediately about him. 'Things beautiful, terrible, pathetic or witty, write themselves on my mind,' he said; 'I do not sit down to write them for others. My senses are perfect; I feel what another man only describes, and if nothing visible is wrought by my hand, be sure my impressions endure longer than those written down ones that are imagined, not known.'

And Madcap, the cause of all—Madcap, who had been to the powers of good lying dormant within him as the air and light that had freed them from their prison, and who knew it not, yet working faith's sweet miracle, had made and kept him what she believed him to be—Madcap was to the world one of those women who are principally known by the attitudes of their husbands towards them, and through Mr. Eyre was invested with a preciousness that made good wives discover a hundred defects in their lords, and bad ones decide that had they been lawfully loved in such fashion it would have been an easy matter to be as pure as she.

Mr. Eyre's soul was with her then, if his body sate at his father's side. One by one he had strangled those scorpions of memory evoked by the ghastly face before him; they were old and fangless, lacking the venom that, projected into his present life, must have poisoned it to the core . . . . exultantly he said to himself that no past sin of his could harm Madcap now; his misdeeds were all buried fathoms deep, beyond the power of God or man to resuscitate. It is so easy to forget the sin that leaves no trace, the hurt that inflicts no abiding scar, as it is in their consequences to those we love that we most forcibly behold our misdeeds; and there was no Eidolon to steal forth from the curtained recesses of Mr. Eyre's soul, and confront him with ghastly presentment of evil as he looked forward, not back, long years of honour stretching before him with Madcap as love and conscience at his side. Even the thought of his treachery to Frank gave him no twinge; one or other of the men who loved her must suffer, and why not Frank; her happiness was the first consideration; everything and everybody must be made to give way to that.

All his life through he had carried things before him by sheer power of will—and so it would be to the end, said this man, who, with Joubert, thought that 'force and right are the governors of the world; force till right is ready.'

What was she doing now, he wondered; reading

his love-letter, or writing him one ; or kissing those boys, who, after all, were his own ; or in thought standing beside him in this chamber, as in spirit he had left it to seek her?

Self-controlled as he was, the blood rose to his temples, and his heart thrilled with a nearer and more vivid sensation of her presence as his father's servant approached bearing a telegram—from her, of course—a little message to keep him from growing too hungry before he could receive her letter. He tore it open, and without needing to look from whom it came, read the context :

'Hester Clarke, mother to the child born six years ago, and drowned by her servant, Janet Stork, in the Shifting Pool, is here ; she has seen and spoken with your wife. Meet me at Lord A——'s at one to-morrow, as without you no reprieve can be obtained.'

He read it straight through without a muscle of his face changing, then walked like a drunken man to the next room, where he sat down, and remained quite motionless for perhaps a minute, when he looked up, and seeing the man, who still lingered by the door, certain of disaster, yet not daring to ask a single question, he bade him prepare him at once for his departure, as he would be setting out for England immediately.

'And is it so bad that you can't wait till the

breath's out of master's body, sir?' said the old servant, in amazement.

To this Mr. Eyre vouchsafed no reply, but sat without movement of any kind at the table for about ten minutes, when he rose, and entering his father's room, stood for a moment looking down on him.

He was on the point of turning to go, when the old man opened his eyes, reasonable and mocking as they had been yesterday.

'Father,' said Mr. Eyre, the word rising unbidden to his lips that had not passed them for thirty years, 'I must leave you, and at once.'

'Has your wife gone off with your best friend?' said the old man cynically; 'better stay with me—a wife is never worth running after unless she happens to belong to another man, and not always then. Stay where you are; misfortunes will happen even in well-regulated families—particularly, I may say, in well-regulated families—and I shall want you to protect me against that abigail's rapacity by-and-by; besides, you know there are fifty roads to town, and rather more to heaven, and it is your duty to stay and see that I don't take the wrong turning,' he added, with a sardonic smile.

'You spoke last night of something you must tell me before you died,' said Mr. Eyre, looking at his watch; 'in three minutes I shall have left this house.'

'Probably to fulfil a worse fate than ever befell an Eyre yet,' said the old man significantly; 'it never

threatened *me*—Barrington escaped it by death; but I've seen some dangerous signs in you—odd that it never occurred to anybody, and odder still the way I found out the old Jezebel's secret; so you'll stay,' he added sharply, 'or rue it to the last day of your life.'

'Farewell, then,' said Mr. Eyre, turning on his father a look of which he knew not the strangeness, and moving to the door.

'Stay!' cried the old man, struggling to rise; 'you are going to your doom.' But Mr. Eyre did not hear him, nor if he had heard would he have returned; till the moment that he should find himself face to face with Madcap, he would be as one in whom the very life itself is suspended.

As he stood with his foot on the carriage-step, giving directions that any letters that should arrive for him should be re-directed to Lovel, a confusion made itself heard in the house behind him, in the midst of which arose a woman's affected shriek. 'Your master is dead,' said Mr. Eyre calmly; 'tell Saunders to make all arrangements for the funeral to take place at Lovel;' then gave the signal to drive on, and was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

'Since in the toils of Fate
Thou art enclos'd, submit, if thou canst brook submission.'

MR. EYRE arrived in town shortly after twelve next day (Friday), and proceeded immediately to the

transaction of one of the most difficult businesses it had ever been his lot to undertake.

He was expected, and shown immediately into the presence of the man whose hand held the scales in which more than one life was trembling; and after a quarter of an hour's interview left, not waiting for Lord Lovel, who was expected in ten minutes. Mr. Eyre had telegraphed from Paris for a special train to be in readiness at one o'clock to take him to Lovel, there being no ordinary one for some hours; and as it left the great city behind, he threw himself back on the cushions, and for the first time absolutely alone since he had received Frank's telegram, began consecutively to *think*. He had neither broken bread, nor tasted wine since that time the day before, but no signs of fatigue were visible in his face or bearing. His brow was still of rock, his lips of adamant. He looked a man bucklered and panoplied against Fate—a target whence her poisoned arrows must glance aside, perchance wounding others, but never himself. Presently he rose, and began to pace the saloon carriage from end to end.

Action of some kind ever seemed indispensable to this man, but all his deeds were as free from hurry, his powerful will as little influenced by outward causes, as the onward, effortless sweep of the albatross is affected by the winds that play around it.

An enemy had once likened him to Etna as described by Pindar, 'the nurse of everlasting frost con-

cealing within deep caverns the fountains of unapproachable fire;' and it was partly perhaps this conviction that beneath an habitual reserve he harboured profound passions, that made him the force among men he undoubtedly was.

Once he started, and uttered an exclamation; it had crossed his mind that even if by superhuman chance Madcap did not know the truth, she might learn it by accident from the newspapers of that day.

To be sure, she rarely read one, her hourly companionship with her husband giving her neither inclination nor need to do so. He told her all that was worth hearing, and passed over the rest, being of Goëthe's opinion, who, on being pressed hard as to the immorality of Byron's writings, said that they were not so immoral as the newspapers.

As Mr. Eyre approached Lovel, one or two signs of impatience escaped him; but no one who saw him alight would have dreamed that there went a man whose every hope of earthly happiness hung on the issues of the next half-hour.

'You have the reprieve, sir?' the station-master ventured to say when he had recovered from his amazement.

'Not I,' said Mr. Eyre, looking at the man as though he would read his very soul.

'But Lord Lovel—' said the man, trembling at his own audacity.

'Oh! he's coming,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly. 'You

may expect him by the last train;' and he went his way on foot.

'It's all over with her,' said the man, as he went back to the station; and in less than half an hour every soul in Lovel and Marmiton alike knew that all hope for the condemned woman was past.

Mr. Eyre walked across the fields with his usual firm step, and observed one or two instances of neglect that would ensure a sharp rebuke to a tenant on the morrow. He noted, too, the old thorn beneath which Madcap loved to sit, and the hedge in which, at a certain time of the year, she never failed to search for moss-cups. At every step of the way, indeed, he was reminded of his wife, and yet he had no definite thought of her as he went. I suppose the man led out to be hanged, does not think of the gallows that rear themselves before him against the pale morning sky; his intense consciousness of them goes deeper than mere sight or thought . . . . and it was with no distinct impression of Madcap in his mind that Mr. Eyre crossed his own threshold, and through the open door went in search of her. It seemed natural to him that the house should be still and quiet as a grave. He did not even seek for her in the lower rooms, but went upstairs, knowing that he would find her there; and only when he found himself in her chamber, and looking at something white stretched on the distant bed, acknowledged to himself that awful fear that had haunted his journey. He looked at it awhile in the

dim misleading light, then forced himself to come nearer ; and seeing what it was, put a fold of it to his lips, then crossed the room to his own that lay beyond.

Through the open doorway he saw her as she knelt close to the window-pane—her curly head looked dark against it, as the young curves of her shape seemed white as an angel's, while her voice had the sweetness of one, as with eyes fixed on the pages she whispered aloud the concluding line of his last letter : 'Good night! good night! don't fear but that this and every night I stand beside you ; and when you fall asleep, be sure that I think you dream of me. . . .'

'Only good night!' she said aloud, as she folded the letter ; 'I thought it had been "*Good-bye*" yesterday.'

She knew then, and it had broken neither her heart nor her love . . . . he had not understood, and for the first time it occurred to Mr. Eyre whether his passion for her were not out of some proportion to its object . . . . and yet it had never entered into his calculations to give all where less might have contented.

Suddenly she looked up and saw him standing in the doorway—silent, dark, even terrible in the gloom —and for a moment, in that great stound of wonder that almost touched fear, she had not power to move, then ran to him, and as his arms closed about her, realised what her life must have been without him.

CHAPTER XII.

IT was as executioner rather than criminal that he took her face in his hands, and lifted it to his own.

'And so—Madcap,' he said; 'and so——'

She clasped both hands about that iron one, and looked up in his face as he had told himself she would look when they were face to face, and said:

'But you'll forgive me?'

He loosed her suddenly. It must always be a wry moment for the murderer when his victim asks his forgiveness . . . . to Madcap it was a frightful one when she stood alone, feeling like a child that, having dreamed itself lost, and wakened sobbing to the clasp of its mother's arms, is all at once thrust out to the ice-cold, desolate wild. . . . .

'I have been very wicked,' she said, feeling that he was a hundred miles away as he stood with fixed gaze bent upon her; 'I have dishonoured you in my thoughts. . . . . I was going away from you . . . . . but it was his fault—a word would have saved me. and he would not speak it; but at last, at last he told me the truth.'

'And what was the truth, Madcap?' said Mr. Eyre calmly.

'He had loved her once,' said Madcap, trembling, 'and perhaps—perhaps for love of me, he did not love

her any more . . . . . and so . . . . . and so left her . . . . . and her little baby was born on what she thought to be our wedding-day.'

'And was it not?' he said, almost harshly.

'On my wedding-day with you, not him,' she said, 'and it died . . . . and it was like Dody . . . . and she said the father of one, must be the father of both . . . . and it was strange, was it not, that Frank's child should be so like yours?'

'*Frank's?*' said Mr. Eyre, recoiling.

'He says that she is mad on that point,' said Madcap wistfully. 'And I am glad now that I was able to be kind to her—that I kissed her . . . . did you not think him honest and brave and true?'—she went on, with a sudden catch in her breath—'I could not have believed it of him, if he had not told me with his own lips . . . . and he was so young too—somehow I never thought of the man she loved as being like Frank—but like *you* . . . . and you will never love him again, and I *despise* him' . . . . she added passionately. 'When he stood before me and said that he would not marry her, would not retrieve the awful irreparable wrong he had done her, I hated him —I compared him with you—your honour with his dishonour, and I taunted him with being what he was, a liar and a coward; and yet he could tell me another lie after that, that I must not go to Hester, for that she would not see me . . . . me, to whom she had told the whole story; and we had cried together . . . . and

I had so hated, so loathed the man who had brought her to such misery. . . .'

'And if it had been I, not Frank, what then, Madcap?' said Mr. Eyre; 'could you not have loved me still, been faithful to me—never changed?'

'Yes.'

'And still clasp me in your arms as you did just now?'

'No!'

'And so we were to live together, we two, like that; or you said something just now of leaving me.'

'Yes.'

'And you *could* have left me?' he said abruptly.

She did not stir or speak, as she stood apart from him; then something very like a groan burst from his lips, that seemed to shape itself to the cry of *Frank!* as with hasty steps he paced the room, Madcap almost forgotten in the deadly struggle going forward in his breast. As his figure passed and repassed her in the gloom, she seemed to herself to be standing in the midst of a reality of which all that had gone before was but as the portent.

The time seemed long before she felt his arms about her, and then not with the old masterful grasp, but more as the dying soldier who, with relaxing hold, clings to the sacred colours that have cost him all save honour; for Mr. Eyre knew that Madcap had beggared him even to that, when he felt her heart beating against his own,

'Poor, pretty Madcap!' he said, 'and so you can love nothing but a good man? Did I ever tell you I was that? And you must hate the sinner even worse than the sin; and you can't make allowances—women never can. And I think there is a little jealousy at the bottom of it, too—more if it had been I, but a little for Frank as it is. And a man sins through thoughtlessness, or because he wants a woman's pure eyes to see the thing in its proper light—with eyes like yours, Madcap—if women only knew how much is in their hands, how they may confirm a man in his ill opinion of them, or make them reflections of what he remembers his own mother to have been. And so you can't forgive Frank? Poor lad! Poor boy!'

'He is not sorry,' said Madcap, her heart still heavy, knowing that forgiveness was yet denied. 'I could be sorry for him if he were . . . . it is the thought of her misery that makes me bitter against him. She has lost all—even her little baby—and he will not be kind to her . . . . and he would not even let me go to see her . . . . but I will go now, with you.'

'Her child died—did she tell you how?' said Mr. Eyre.

'No; but I think that some one had been unkind to it; and she shall love Dody as she pleases.'

'And so you kissed her, Madcap,' he said. 'How sweet! how womanly! And you always loved children; but don't regret that one—it might have grown up a bad man like its father. Why have you not girls, Madcap,

with your eyes and your smile? And here you have been suffering for other people's sins; and an unselfish nature like yours needs no apprenticeship to suffering—it understands and enters into each throe. . . . And so you kissed her, and she loves you, to be sure; and now you'll kiss *me!* And if I'd committed every crime in life you should have no chance of running away from me after to-day. We'll dine together, and I'll dress you for it in white, though my father is dead; but you can wear black for him to-morrow. I can't see you in this darkness—I must have light.' And he rang the bell to summon her maid.

The woman started back at the sound of his voice, but he bade her light candles, and lay out a white gown for her mistress; her shoes were to be white as well, and a white flower was to be brought for her hair; and when all this was done he bade the woman hasten dinner, for that he was very hungry.

When he had put on her little shoes, and arranged the flower in her hair, clasped a string of pearls about her neck, and a silken ribbon round her waist, he brought a wax candle and held it above her.

'Let me look at you,' he said. 'And so you were going away from me. How exquisite you are! I seem to have forgotten you, and your whiteness and beauty come upon me with a surprise. I am as one who has lived so long in the light as to forget how beautiful it is, and wanted a sudden plunge into darkness to make me realise the preciousness of it. And

could you have left me?' he added, as he set the light down, and caught her to his breast.

She did not reply, only wondered, as she clung to him, how she could ever have thought existence possible apart from him, and knew that if he had been guilty, she yet could not have sent him back to Hester.

'You'll take me to her?' she whispered presently.

'I'll make no promise,' he said, holding her from him, 'but you'll make me one: that you'll not seek her out, or see her, without my consent.'

And Madcap lightly gave the promise that was kept so heavily.

CHAPTER XIII.

'The best of rest is sleep,
And that thou oft provok'st; yet grossly fear
Thy death, which is no more.'

EXCITEMENT ran high in Lovel on the evening before the day fixed for the execution. It was known that Colonel Busby had returned from town unsuccessful, and that Lord Lovel had departed on the same mission the previous afternoon. But when it was bruited abroad that Mr. Eyre had unexpectedly returned, but spoken no word of a reprieve, all hope was considered to be over; and on the two women who sat side by side within the gaol had fallen the deadly quiet of those to whom expectation was past, and the con-

summation of the morrow as inevitably fixed as the rising of the sun.

Janet's impending fate was too awful, and too near, to permit Hester's mind to dwell on any thought of self; she saw but the black outline of the scaffold rearing itself against the sky, heard but the cruel shout of the crowd as she appeared by Janet's side, felt her own life wrenched violently from her body as she beheld it jerked out of Janet's, and passed with Janet's soul through those awful pangs of dissolution she knew not whither.

Across the blackness now and again a child's face flitted—dimpled, lovely, with warm loving lips that pressed her own—a thrill of joy shot through her; for a moment she looked beyond that dread to-morrow, and tasted a rapture for which her heart so long had thirsted; then she thrust the thought away, and took Janet's cold hand between both her own and held it fast.

'Mistress,' said Janet softly, 'don't fret; if it weren't for you I'd rather go; t'other death in life 'ud be worse, an' I'd be as much cut off from you as if I was dead . . . . an' if only you'd bide away, I'd have no fear.'

'I'll stay with you till the last,' said Hester; ''tis I that should be hanging, not you.'

Janet shook her head.

'The baby's death lies at my door,' she said; 'but I've thought of something as'll make it less lonely

for you when I'm gone; that child you told me of last night—steal it.'

'Janet!' cried Hester, drawing back from the woman in horror.

'Ay,' said Janet, lawless in everything that concerned her mistress's welfare; 'she's got another, she can well spare *him;* let *her* suffer a bit, an' when they as we knows on sees her look as white and whisht as I see *you*, he'll know better what he's done than he knows now.'

'She called me "sister,"' said Hester, slow tears rolling down her cheeks; 'she kissed me. I'll not harm her any more than I've done already; I can't be like her, but I'll never forget it, how good she's been to me . . . . I'd like to show her that a bad woman can sometimes be as generous as a good one . . . . if only I might see the child sometimes . . . . she said that I might love him, and that he would love me, but that was before. . . .'

'Then bide here, mistress,' said Janet eagerly, knowing that the worst of death would be over if she could leave her mistress with some interest in life that would draw her out of herself, and keep her from thought. 'You've got a bit of money, an' can live where you please; just pity *her*, and love the child to your heart's content, an' after a while you'll forget . . . . the other . . . . and you don't love *him* now?'

'No,' said Hester in a whisper; 'somehow mother's love seems to swallow up all other love . . . . from

the moment my child was born I put *him* second . . . . if he'd loved me it might have been different . . . . but there was shame between him and me, but none towards the baby . . . . and I'll always think that the woman who's missed motherhood, having the mother's heart, has missed the purest, intensest joy God ever gave, and the most lasting . . . . it's made me a better woman than I'd ever have been without.'

'Then if you can bear to see him,' said Janet slowly, 'you'll stay . . . . you won't harm *her*.'

'No,' said Hester, in a whisper; 'I promised Lord Lovel I'd go away, but I'd live on a crust if I might see the child sometimes . . . . I feel his arms round my neck now, and hear his little voice calling me.'

'Then feel them in flesh an' blood to-morrow,' cried Janet, 'go to him, mistress; sure there's none 'ud have the heart to come between you, an' you'll forget about me . . . . an' after a bit, knowing I'm at rest, you'll give over fretting for the little baby.'

The gathering darkness almost hid the women from each other's eyes, as by a sudden impulse they turned, and clung together—'Janet . . . . Mistress . . . .;' and in the darkness a kiss was exchanged, that spoke the perfect reconciliation and peace that lay between these two miserable, faithful hearts.

* * * * *

A great crowd had gradually assembled within the prison gates, but it was quiet, and conversed little. All eyes were turned in a certain direction; all ears

were strained to discover the first sound of carriage-wheels from the direction of the station, for the last train was now due, by which, if Lord Lovel did not arrive with the reprieve, the last chance would be over.

At nine o'clock a low hum rose, and swelled gradually to a roar, as a carriage was heard approaching, and there came gradually within the eager ken of the crowd the conveyance that was wont to convey strangers to and from the station.

A deep groan of disappointment went up from the assemblage; the driver was half dragged from his seat by a dozen eager hands, while his speech was lost in the universal howl of anger that rent the air. To have waited here in the chill evening for a whole hour, confidently looking forward to the spectacle of Lord Lovel dashing up in his own carriage at full speed, waving the reprieve out of the window, and to be put off with a sorry one-horse chaise, and Jim Pipes, the one-eyed driver—it was beyond human patience; and only by degrees was it gathered that Lord Lovel had not arrived at all by that train.

Within the prison, that savage shout had awakened the two women from an uneasy doze into which they had fallen. For a moment they clung together wildly, thinking that it was morning, and they were on their way to the place of execution. . . . .

The stillness that followed seemed to those within to last hours. Neither spoke, and only the loud beating of their hearts was heard in the silence of the

cell. But presently footsteps were heard approaching, the door was thrown back, and the turnkey entered bearing a lantern, and followed by the chaplain, who, approaching the two women, told Janet briefly, but in words of strong feeling, that hope was over, and only resignation to the will of God left to her. Then he kneeled down and prayed, and the women, clasping hands, kneeled and prayed also, losing the sense and the sound of the clamour without, as they followed, word for word, and from their hearts, that simple, reverent voice. . . .

The extreme favour that could be granted to Janet on earth was permitted, and Hester allowed to spend with her the last few hours of remaining life. Towards dawn they fell asleep, and were awakened from that fitful slumber by the loud unbarring of the door, through which came several people, hurrying on each other's heels, and while Hester thought '*It is day*,' Janet saw not the awaiting gallows, felt not the approaching death-pangs for herself, but only as Hester, as spectator, winced and drew back. . . .

Then, from out of that crowd of faces, one singled itself and advanced—it was that of Lord Lovel, who looked past the two women as at some sight beyond, and even as he cried to Janet, 'You are saved!' saw only Madcap safe, and clasped in her husband's arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

'You may take my purse, . . . but the self is my own, and God my Maker's.'

As Frank sat at breakfast next morning, Job entered, and announced Mr. Eyre.

Frank rose, but did not advance to meet his visitor, nor had Job heard any greeting pass between them when he reluctantly closed the door.

Frank's eyes were downcast; he it was who looked the sinner as Mr. Eyre approached and wrung his hand, compelling him to look up and meet his glance.

'And so you've saved me, Frank,' he said; 'and I'd submit to worse dishonour for *her*. After all, I'd change places with you—but no—she loves *me*, not you.'

'It was nothing,' said Frank, turning aside; 'anyone else would have done as much.'

His back was turned to Mr. Eyre, across whose features an expression of love flashed as he looked at the man whom, next to Madcap, he loved better than anything on earth.

'And now for the future,' he said. 'So long as that woman is in the village there is no safety, and the other may be in gaol here some days longer. I have already taken steps to get her removed, but the law moves slowly; and meanwhile, I suppose, the other won't leave her?'

'No,' said Frank, thinking of those two despairing figures, locked in each other's arms, that he had seen overnight; 'they are bound together by a common misery; they have only one another in the world.'

'Good God, Frank!' burst out Mr. Eyre; 'you know I was ignorant of the chain of events that led to this awful fatality. If the woman had only told me the truth when I left her, the whole thing would have been averted.'

Frank turned—no longer as Madcap's saviour, Hester's champion, he looked at Mr. Eyre, but as man to man, acknowledging, as only a man can, the temptations beneath which his fellow has stumbled.

For a man cannot change his nature because a single passion has called out all that is best and noblest in him; so much the more as its object is beyond his reach, so much the more struggle to keep that purity at fever heat is needed . . . . and Frank had been no Simon Pure, having erred and fallen like weaker men, hating himself always, and looking back to that 'might have been,' which is oftener a fount of bitterness than a source of future moral development.

It was on that ground of common brotherhood that he took Mr. Eyre's hand and cried, 'You didn't know, and I'll stand by you through it till they are gone.'

'And after?' exclaimed Mr. Eyre.

'I'll go back to India and stay there a dozen years or so—perhaps the county will have forgotten the story by then.'

'And why should you go?' said Mr. Eyre; 'what is popular rumour, public opinion, to you? *We* love you—and you love us—remain, and let us all be happy together.'

'In Arcadia we might be,' said Frank bitterly, 'but here—no, I could tell a lie for her—but to remain—to see her every day and not love her—it is beyond my strength . . . . and people will talk,' the young fellow added abruptly.

'Let them,' said Mr. Eyre indifferently, for he knew his friend's heart as well as his wife's, and discerned danger in neither; 'and as to the county—it shall stand cap in hand to you yet——'

'I don't want the county,' said Frank, to whom the name of his honour mattered nothing, while the honour itself was his own, 'and I can't stay—as soon as *she* is safe, I go.'

'And if she is still in danger—if you can secure her happiness by remaining—you will stay?' said Mr. Eyre.

'I will stay,' said Frank reluctantly.

'Her happiness before everything,' said Mr. Eyre; 'all must give way to that—your life or mine is nothing in comparison with it—this to be persisted in to the end.'

'To the end!' cried Frank, with no suspicion of that to which he was swearing himself.

'But I must see her,' said Mr. Eyre; 'I mean the woman, Hester Clarke. You will arrange for me to

meet her somewhere in your own grounds after dark. I will repair the wrong unwittingly done, but on certain terms. There can be no attraction in the place to induce her to remain.'

It never crossed Mr. Eyre's mind that Hester might love him still. Love that is not valued mostly knocks at the door in beggar's guise, and is refused admittance, while we set the door wide for what comes tardily, its footsteps beating on our hearts.

'My wife asked me an odd question about Barrington,' resumed Mr. Eyre. 'She thought he went to her after the marriage—*your* supposed marriage—and asked the woman not to interfere. He always liked her, and I told another lie, and said it was he. Poor Barrington, he never had the heart or sense to conceive the idea. But why didn't you write and tell me?' he added suddenly.

'You were happy,' said Frank, 'and she loved you. I let well alone, believing that you would never hear more of Hester. She neither knew your name nor home. It was the fatal curiosity of her servant, Janet Stork, that brought about the whole catastrophe.'

'Heaven knows how she traced me,' said Mr. Eyre, who was walking to and fro; 'through some mark on my linen, probably, or a dropped letter.'

'What is her sentence?' said Frank, who had sat down wearily, as though, on the brink of battle, his courage had failed him.

'Fifteen years,' said Mr. Eyre, who, feeling himself

to be once more master of his own fate, hardly heeded Frank's dejection.

'And if Hester refuses to go?' said Frank.

'Oh, she won't,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly, in the tone of a man who has never learned the meaning of the word defeat; and something of Frank's old admiration returned as he looked at the dauntless, resolute face, that had once seemed to him the noblest upon earth.

'Don't take Madcap's anger to heart,' said Mr. Eyre suddenly; 'it will wear itself out, and she loves you dearly. You'll help me to guard her against any meeting with Hester. When I'm not beside her, *you* will be.'

'No,' cried Frank passionately; 'I can't face her scorn. Don't ask me to approach her; I will keep Hester away, and guard her—but from a distance.'

'Pshaw!' said Mr. Eyre; 'you make the sacrifice, then shrink from a mere nothing; it is her love for you, and a little womanly jealousy, that makes her so bitter; but that will pass. And now you'll arrange for me to see the woman—the sooner the better. Good-bye, Frank; a man doesn't *thank* God exactly for saving him from a hideous fate, so I don't thank you; and, after all, you did it for Madcap, not me.'

He opened the door so suddenly that Job fell head foremost over the threshold.

'So,' said Mr. Eyre, 'you have overheard all.'

'Swear instantly,' cried Frank sternly to Job, 'that you will never repeat one syllable, or, old friend and

servant that you are, you leave this house within an hour.'

'I swear,' said Job sullenly, and turning upon Mr. Eyre an undisguised look of hatred.

'He is an honest man, so we are safe,' said Mr. Eyre coolly, as he left the room, then mounted his horse, and was gone; while Frank, left alone, stood with folded arms and fixed gaze bent on his mother's portrait, who smiled at him from the canvas with that look of love which is the first thing on earth that her child understands, as it is the last that he forgets; and in no moment of his life had Frank felt that he needed her as much as now.

CHAPTER XV.

'Ye have dropped a'down your head,
And it seems as if ye tread
On your own hearts in the path
Ye are called to in His wrath.'

JUSTICE in the case of Janet Stork was not leaden-footed, but swift, so that hardly a week elapsed between the respite from the capital punishment and her removal to the first stage of her journey on the way to a convict settlement.

It was on the eve of Janet's departure that Hester, torn in two between her fancied duty to accompany her servant, her longing to remain, set out to play her

part in the interview with Mr. Eyre arranged by Frank in a secluded spot on his own estate. Yesternight she might have met him, and yielded to his bidding; but that very day, as she had stumbled forth from the prison cell, Madcap's children had crossed her path and Dody had run to and kissed her . . . . and then duty had grown chill, and self-denial hard, and a desperate longing to snatch at the love offered to her lips, strove in her with that vow which she had mentally registered to Madcap.

She had hardly thought of Mr. Eyre in the confusion and horror of the last week; he might have been dead, for any promptings of love or memory that impelled her towards him; but now, as she hurried along the way to meet him, a sudden sense of his near presence checked her steps, and she went laggingly, with ghosts of long dead memories thronging in her heart.

Frank, approaching from an opposite direction, was thinking sadly of many things, stopping short once with the sudden conviction that he had been a fool.

But in the same moment he thought of her and wavered —truly, as Pascal has said, the heart has reasons of which judgment, so called, knows nothing. And perhaps in obeying the dictates of the heart, at the expense of self-interest, he had unconsciously contributed his little quota to the greatness of the world—perchance, however humbly a hero, his life had become 'a piece of the everlasting heart of Nature itself;' and no worsened in soul, if in bodily estate, was Frank Lovel

that night as he pursued his way to the spot where he was to meet Hester, and conduct her to Mr. Eyre.

He hardly noted outward things—how a nightingale's song was scattered like a necklace of pearls by the hideous *vox humana* of the screech-owl; how strange creatures crossed his path, and strange scents were given out on the breeze (for the night hath its splendours, of which the day knows nothing)—each moment he expected one of these trees that stood so still, yet seemed to move like one of a giant army at his approach, to resolve itself into the shape of a woman; and so, at the nearest point of approach to the village, did an oak-tree so resolve itself, and Hester's pale face sought his own.

Frank felt her hand tighten on his, as he led her to the cleared space in which Mr. Eyre was standing, his face and figure fitfully revealed by the uncertain moonlight, and knew how in that moment she had forgotten her dead child, and its living likeness . . . . how Madcap's kiss was to her faint and far away, as she saw before her the man who had been to her the all in all of her life . . . . and that thrill of tenderness which moves a true woman to what has cost her much, spoke in her gesture as, relinquishing Frank's support, she ran forward, uttering his name.

It was one that Madcap never called him by—it had been used by others, and therefore was not fit for her lips—but one other than the man for whom it was intended heard it, as, while Frank had retreated,

Job advanced, and at a distance of half a dozen paces was both spectator and hearer of the scene.

'Master,' she said as one who, recalling the dead by a name that he has forgotten, seeks to remind him of her by one more familiar still, 'it's Hester . . . . and I've done you no harm yet, and I wouldn't harm *her* . . . .'

He did not stir beneath her voice, but shook off her timid touch with a silent contempt that for the moment cowed her, then roused in her breast that spirit which loneliness and suffering never quite quench in a woman's heart.

'You could not harm her if you wished,' he said coldly. 'The sin was yours and mine; the punishment be ours, not hers.'

'*Ours?*' she said, with both hands pressed against her bosom. 'And do we share anything? Do you take your half of it all? Does your heart cry out for our little dead child? Does it go with Janet to her living tomb? . . . . If it does, I'll forgive you . . . . but you've got *her* and your own children . . . . it can't be equal. . . . It never is between man and woman. . . .'

She was struggling hard to repress the rising passion in her . . . . she had meant to be so humble, to ask from her knees the one poor favour that she coveted; but the consciousness of real power would not be kept down . . . . only, whatever happened, Madcap should not suffer.

'My share of it is to remain,' he said, 'yours to go; mine to guard her against ever discovering the truth, yours to perform no deed that could reveal it to her. The whole sequence of events is due to yourself only—had you placed me in possession of the truth they could not have occurred, and their consequences must not, *shall* not, fall on an innocent head.'

'*Shall* not!' repeated Hester. 'You talk like God, and I am to go . . . .' she struggled for quietness, but the tide within had risen beyond her control. 'You take in your hands a human life, and say it shall be thus and thus—it shall do certain things, and leave others undone—as though you were a force to compel it when its force is in itself, and it must obey itself and God; and I can't go . . . . not yet . . . . it's like snatching the bread away from a starving mouth . . . . you must love him yourself . . . . though you never loved little children. . . .'

He did not reply, and in the uncertain light she could not see which way his features were inclined—perhaps to mercy, she thought, with the anger overborne in her by those throbbing pulses of motherhood that from her child's birth had set this man beyond and apart from her as something lost, by which had come a something better . . . . as she strove to read his face, an impulse of recurrent love moved her to cry:

'You'd never have loved mine . . . . but you'll let me love *yours* . . . . it'll harm neither you nor her

. . . . and I'll never try to speak to her . . . . and I could bear it all, the baby's drowning, and Janet's going away . . . . if only you'll let me stay . . . .' The wrung spirit of the woman, the failing heart that fluttered and sunk in her breast, like a dying bird, as she uttered her plea, might have moved him . . . . as perchance it moved the nightingale above, who had ceased his song, shamed out of it by the throbbing passion of that human voice below.

But there is not on earth so cold a hearth as that on which a hastily kindled fire has flared up, and died out suddenly . . . . it is only the steady growth, the warmth of years, that lingers long after the fire itself has ceased ; as there is on earth nothing so cruel as a man to whom love is offered that he does not desire. . . .

'It is impossible,' said Mr. Eyre, in that tone none had hitherto dared resist. 'Your mere presence here is an outrage upon——' he stopped abruptly, and the omission of Madcap's name, as one not to be spoken in her presence, stung Hester keenly.

'She kissed me . . . . and you can't stain such lips as hers . . . . and when she knew, she wanted to come to me . . . . "I must go to her—to Hester," she said ; he told me so—that she called me that . . . . and yet her name's too good to be said before me . . . . the shame's in the lips of those that speak —you can't shame *her*.'

'What you propose is madness,' said Mr. Eyre calmly ; 'your presence here must be a perpetual an-

noyance to all concerned; you will be the object of doubt and suspicion to the village—a perpetual disgrace to Lord Lovel, whose relations with you would be misconstrued. You have conceived an extravagant fancy for one of my children—to gratify it, you would sacrifice the happiness of her whom you profess to honour; in short, by remaining, you lose all, and gain nothing.'

As he spoke, her heart grew cold—her long and faithful reticence, her proud reserve from meddling with his happiness . . . . her lonely life, in which she had so staunchly kept her vow to Frank . . . . all these were unrecognised by *him*, did not even demand one word of kindness or of thanks . . . . and to offer one's single jewel, and see it shrined high in honour, is other than to see it cast down contemptuously beneath the swine's feet.

'It's nothing to you,' she said, with that fierce mother-ring in her voice which Madcap would have understood—'nothing to give up what you've been hungering, thirsting after for six years; nothing to drag a child's arms from round your neck, and go out into the night to be haunted by them . . . . if she didn't love him so, I'd take him away and make him love *me* . . . . I'd be happy . . . . and I'm to give it all up because *you* want to be happy; and so you may be . . . . but I must have a few crumbs . . . . she'd not grudge them to me if she knew.'

Had Mr. Eyre in that moment abandoned his life-

long rule of force, to stoop to *finesse*—could he have spoken one word of kindness, or in any way treated her on that ground of common humanity which brings soul near to soul—he might have extracted from Hester any terms he pleased; but the power of uttering such a word, bringing about such an understanding, was impossible to him. That fierce faithfulness to Madcap (more womanly than manlike) which made all other women superfluities in the world's creation, and the existence of this one a direct menace and insult to her he idolised, hardened his heart to stone, as he replied, 'There are other children in the world, adopt one; I will see that all arrangements for your comfort are made.'

'Comfort!' she cried passionately; 'would comfort satisfy you if you had not her . . . . could you take some other body in your arms and love it as if it were her . . . . can any other child be to me what *this* one is, brother to my little baby . . . . made in your image? . . . . But I don't want him for that. . . . *She* would not offer me *comfort* . . . . she knew better; she said that he should *love* me . . . . and I can't harm her by staying . . . . and I'll stay.'

'To starve,' said Mr. Eyre, 'for from this moment I cease the allowance I made to you; remain, and your fate be upon your own head.'

'You mean to kill me?' she said, coming close to him in the half-light, their eyes flashing like crossed swords as they met; 'then kill me now . . . I've done

her no harm yet; but I may . . . . there's no knowing where a sin 'll stop, and death's followed in the track of this one . . . and perhaps there's murder to follow.'

'If you harm her, there may be.'

'Then you *would* kill me?'

'Ay, if it would save her misery.'

'God help her!' burst out Hester, 'for her punishment is in *you*, not me.'

'And you remain?' he said calmly.

'Yes—I can starve, or I can die.'

'Die then!' he exclaimed; 'you resolve to stay—be it so. Your fate be on your own head.'

Job shrank within himself as from a bitter wind as Mr. Eyre, looking neither right nor left, passed him by, but made a step forward and was nearly betrayed, when Hester, falling on her knees, sobbed out:

'I'll stay, but I'll never harm her, so help me God! . . . . but I'll love the child . . . . and it'll love me . . . . though I'd have given up even that, if he'd said a word to show he remembered . . . .'

As Frank, who had met Mr. Eyre, approached, she rose trembling to her feet—smitten by a new remorse on the young fellow's behalf that turned her vows to sobs, as, led by him, she passed through the woods towards Marmiton; and even as Frank thanked God, thinking all had turned out well, and she had behaved nobly, Hester was asking herself, with dim prophetic instinct that chilled her blood, if renunciation would not have brought her purer happiness, than that eagerly coveted joy that she snatched at in defiance of death itself.

BOOK II.—REAPED.

CHAPTER I.

'Forlornly brave,
And quivering with the dart he drave.'

MADCAP sat with her back to the wistaria wall, that was just then hung with pale translucent clusters of sweetness and colour, and as she drew one of those azure trails across her lips, realised, as she had never done before, the lesson of happiness that the flowers teach us year by year.

They say to us (and it is a message from God they speak, if only we could understand it), 'We withered and died last year, but we have come back again to you; and so will joy, but you must wait for it, as *we* have waited long, but struggled into the light at last.'

And to the heart that can feel this outward influence, there is no death possible: it will rejoice where religion would bid it mourn, and in worshipping its Creator's works, will forget itself.

As one who has died ignorant, and wakened to the value of what it formerly held cheap (so Lazarus maybe found elements of grandeur in Martha's much

serving when he again joined the home circle, as he must have seen with clearer eyes Mary's beauty and helplessness), Madcap, in the vigorous rebound from a crushing blow, had sprung to a keenness of content in her everyday existence that made precious the commonest incident of everyday home life, where all was her own, not stolen from another woman's store of happiness, or snatched at with a sense that hunger impended over the next moment, yet so vividly new that her husband's step thrilled her as when he had been first her lover, and her children's voices sounded sweet in her ears as when they had first faltered her name.

She heard herself softly called by one of them at that very moment, and looking round, saw Dody peeping at her from behind a tree, coaxing her with a small forefinger to approach.

'Us is going a-maying, mummy,' he said in a whisper; 'will 'oo come too?'

'To a-maying, my sweetheart?' she said. 'It's too late for a-maying.'

'Oh no, mother,' said Doune, who had come up; 'it's a real one, only they've got lilac and things instead of may, and it's just as pretty. I heard Josephine tell the black lady so yesterday.'

Madcap started up, and forgetting that she had promised not to leave that corner of the garden on which Mr. Eyre's study gave (for he could not write, he said, if on looking up now and then she were not within sight), slipped behind the bush that had screened

the little brothers from their father, and putting an arm round each, asked them, between the kisses that even in her hurry she could not forget—

'What black lady, and where did you see her?'

'S'pose she thought it was grandpa's funeral every day,' said Doune practically. 'We met her in the copse, mother, and she is as fond of kissing Dody as you are.'

'And her ky—and *ky*,' said Dody, shaking his head sadly. 'Sink dat's the poor 'ooman daddy's been punishing—eh, mummy?'

'No, no!' cried Madcap passionately. 'And were you kind to her, Dody?' she added, taking the child's lovely flushed face between her hands.

'Oh yes,' he said, nodding; 'me told her not to ky, and me kissed her; but me *couldn't* call her mummy, 'oo know; *you* is mummy,' and he patted her face fondly.

'Josephine's waiting for us at the gate, and daddy's gone to sleep,' said Doune, taking his mother's hand to lead her away; and seized by a sudden impulse, for which her youth perhaps was accountable, Madcap went away with them across the garden to where the nurse waited.

Mr. Eyre had laid no commands on her going out, or coming in, nor had he enforced her promise with regard to Hester; he had simply rendered any meeting between the two women impossible by never letting his wife out of his sight. But to-day the

strange occurrence had befallen him of falling into a sudden dead sleep as he sat at his table, the result, probably, of those waking nights that had lately fallen to his lot.

Josephine started and coloured as her mistress approached—a close observer would have said guiltily, if the facile French face were permitted by its owner to express deceit—but she answered composedly enough that the maying was a mile beyond the village, and then waited for the children to be given over to her charge.

But with four little eager hands pulling at her two more than half-willing ones, the garden seemed to Madcap a dull enough refuge to return to, and she permitted herself to be dragged through the gate that opened on the copse (the only egress from the house save through the village), and step by step the greater length of it, till suddenly, all flushed with romping and happiness, she came to the very spot where she had kneeled by Hester, and heard her story.

'Me *so* tired,' said Dody, sitting down on the grass, as Madcap paused and clasped both hands to her heart. 'Come and sit on my knee, mummy,' he added, patting a tiny lap invitingly.

'Tired already?' cried Madcap, forgetting Hester, and thinking that she saw a shade of unusual pallor on the little beloved face.

'Oh no, ma'am!' said Josephine, whose rule in life it was always to tell a lie when the truth was not

pleasant; 'but he is so fond of this copse, and will always sit down just here'—then, with her usual tact, withdrew a little, and affected to busy herself over a scrap of work she took from her pocket.

Madcap stood for a moment looking around, then, yielding to Dody's entreaties, sat down with him beside her, while Doune, tired out with his search after birds'-nests, came to her other side, and leaned his head on her shoulder—a rare sign of tenderness in the boy, and one that brought the colour to Madcap's cheek. Does a mother's love for her child lie in the joy, the delight, he is to her, or is it something entirely independent of the return he may make to her in kind? For a long while the word 'mother' carries no significance with it to his mind; he loves her as something tenderer, gentler to him than any other, but he would be equally happy with anyone equally devoted. And even when he begins to understand, the vigorous strivings of life impel him to escape from her arms . . . . it is in the infrequent caress, the unexpected kiss, that the mother finds her reward when, without her bidding, he will run to her and clasp his little arms about her knees, or momentarily lean his head against her breast, as if he would convey to her that, though he knows not what the word 'mother' means, he yet feels her to be different to all others in the world.

A shadow crossed the three, and Madcap looked up with a start to see Frank in the act of passing

them. He was very pale, and raised his hat without seeming to look at her, and continued his way towards the Hall.

'"'Spect he's gone to romp with Josephine,' said Dody, looking after the young man with much interest; while Madcap wondered if he would dare—no, surely he would not *dare* to cross her threshold.

'Josephine's got Digges for a sweetheart,' said Doune, with a superior nod; 'she doesn't romp with anyone else now. *That's* the man that carried off the black lady, isn't it, mother?'

But Madcap was gazing after Frank's vanishing shape—and indeed he made a charming figure, as anyone must have admitted who did not hate a sinner worse than his sin (as perhaps Madcap unconsciously did), and then—'women are strange'—she caught the two boys' hands in her own, and, long before Frank had got himself out of sight, had set off running in the opposite direction; so that when Frank, who placed his pride second to her safety, looked round, it was to see her vanishing like a new Atalanta in the distance, whereupon he turned and ran too, till when at last she stopped breathless, it was to find at her heels what she thought to have left far behind.

Doune had not turned a hair, but Dody was coughing violently with the haste at which he had been swept along; and as Madcap caught him up, she flashed at poor Frank a look that included cruelty to

her child in the list of the young man's other misdemeanours.

Perhaps he chose to accept that glance as a greeting, however hostile, for he said, 'You were going to the village?'

Scorning to reply, Madcap went forward, but Dody turned his head over his mother's shoulder, and, by way of friendly overture, remarked, 'Us is going a-maying!'

'So am I,' said Frank resolutely, and wondering if Mr. Eyre were mad to let his treasure thus go unguarded; 'but are you wise to go?' he added, addressing the back of a little chestnut head. 'There will be rough people there—gipsies, beggars, tramps of all kinds.'

'Are you my keeper?' cried Madcap, stopping short in the pathway, and stamping her foot with a passion that made Dody, vaguely alarmed, cling round her neck, crying:

'*Don't* be angedy, mummy; *don't* be angedy!'

'Mother's not afraid of anybody,' said Doune, pressing defiantly against her side; 'she's going to dance with us, and *we'll* take care of her.'

'Where is Josephine?' cried Madcap, for the first time noticing the girl's disappearance.

'She has gone back to the Hall,' said Frank, the colour coming into his face.

'At your request?' said Madcap, setting Dody down and facing the young man.

'At my request.'

'Oh! this is intolerable,' cried Madcap, 'that you are to force your company on me thus—that I am to be placed under surveillance, my very servants sent away at your bidding! Until to-day I had always thought a lady was free to choose her own society——'

'I regret,' he said, 'that I am compelled to inflict myself on you until Mr. Eyre comes.'

'Did he constitute you my gaoler?' she said, with a bitter contempt that was like a mirror held up to him of what he was in her eyes. 'May I ask what special fitness for the post made you undertake it? These poor people around will not harm me . . . . . nor would *she* . . . . and nothing that she could say to me would make me scorn and loath you more than I do now.'

'Mummy's very angedy,' said Dody, in an awe-struck voice; 'but she won't smack you,' he added, slipping a gentle little hand in Frank's, whereupon the poor young fellow caught the child up, and for a moment held the rosy face against his own pale one, at which Madcap cried, with a half-sob:

'Would you rob me of my children?' and went a step or two alone for pride, then paused, expecting to be overtaken by the little lovers who had never hitherto failed her, but they were too taken up with Frank to leave him; and so, in solitary pride, she passed the forge, descended the village, and crossing the meadow

and the wood beyond, emerged suddenly on the green where the merry-making was held.

In the centre rose a magnificent horse-chestnut, from whose trunk the may-bowers or alleys radiated like the green spokes of a giant wheel, built of green and blossoming boughs, arched overhead, and hung with great clusters of lilac, laburnum, and guelder roses, that swept the hair of the lads and lasses who passed below.

Two and two, hand in hand, smiling in each other's eyes, sweethearts for to-day, if not to-morrow, the joyous couples danced in and out of the seemingly endless alleys, many a fine-turned leg and twinkling foot marking off the stirring moments to a merry tune discoursed by the blind fiddler from the next parish.

Without, the old men and women loitered, their eyes brightening as the young faces came and went. They saw what they had once been, what they would like to be once more, and perhaps sighed to think that these merry lovers must in time come to be as themselves . . . . but Mr. Frith has long ago told the scene much more beautifully in colours than I can ever do in words. . . .

Madcap forgot Frank to gaze with delight at the scene, and the children, escaping from him, clasping hands, and falling in behind the last Jack and Jill, danced merrily in and out, round and about, with the rest, their dark heads sprinkled from above with scatterings of sweetest colour—never pausing, save to entreat their mother and Frank to come and dance also.

But he was hardly thinking of Madcap then in his keen anxiety that Mr. Eyre should arrive. Each moment he dreaded the appearance of Hester, who was to meet Dody at the maying (by golden means he had charmed this fact from Josephine in his moment of speech with her in the copse); and though she wished Madcap well, the risk of the two women once more meeting was not to be exaggerated. But if Frank's eyes could have pierced the stout body of a tree not a dozen yards from him, he would have seen in hiding the very woman whose presence he dreaded.

Mr. Eyre, approaching from the village, saw Hester thus, marked the crouching gait, the eagerly peering eyes bent on Madcap—the whole fierceness of demeanour that yet betokened yearning love and disappointed hope, and feeling towards her as some noxious thing that threatened the life of what he loved, passed her by with a look heavy as a blow; then, stepping to his wife's side, took her hand and said:

'So you have come a-maying, Madcap—and Frank too; and look at those young rogues,' he added, as the children came running towards them with chains of roses about their necks, 'and it's all very pretty, and I'll take you home by a new way across the green'—and so, with a word here and there to the merry-makers, led her away, and only on looking back some time later discovered that Frank and the children had disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

'Bring a grey cloud from the east,
Where the lark is singing—
Something of the song at least
Unlost in the bringing. . . .'

ONE may do worse things than sit in a new-mown haycock, eating a syllabub. But the flavour of the one Madcap was eating had been taken away by the presence in the hayfield of a young man who stood at a little distance, talking to her husband.

Mr. Eyre had for a long time endured in silence the daily, hourly expression of her contempt for Frank, had even thrown new lights on the young man's wickedness by fancy sketches, half grotesque, half pathetic, of the different states of mind through which he must have run. But at length the subject had become too much for even his iron nerves, and he had begged of her, since they could not mend the matter, to discuss it with him no more. On one point he had been firm, that when they met Lord Lovel, either abroad or in the village, she should accord to him the recognition that was suitable, considering the friendly relations that had ever existed between the two families, all the more so that the county had received him with a coldness, and subjected him to slights,

that, while borne by Frank with simple heroism, roused every instinct of manhood in Mr. Eyre, and made him curse the day when through Hester he had lost his independence.

And Madcap had so far obeyed him as to sweep Frank a magnificent curtsey when she met him at a neighbour's house, then turned on her heel the next moment, and this she called a recognition more than equal to his merits, as she told Mr. Eyre later. And he had laughed grimly—somehow he was always grim now, though more her lover than ever; sometimes she thought his father's death must have shocked him, he had become so gray, and the lines in his face so deep. Perhaps, too, he felt for her bitter disappointment in Frank, as he had loved the lad, even while he robbed him.

But she had never dreamed Lord Lovel would dare approach her in her own home till to-day, when, on looking up, she had seen Mr. Eyre with Frank beside him ; and though the latter had the grace to pause at a distance to receive her slight acknowledgment of his presence, she none the less felt that here was the beginning of an intimacy that could never prove anything but intolerable to her.

'And what a lack of delicacy,' she thought, lifting her eyes to a face that gave no sign (for he was by now reconciled to standing in her opinion for what he was not), and, indeed, showed so much health, sweetness, and good humour as provoked her with him

more than ever, and showed him ugly as sin beside Mr. Eyre's virtue. To the children no such deformity was apparent as they left Madcap, and ran to him with a familiarity that even their father's presence could not check; and at this fresh proof of how all things loved him, she thought of Hester, and turned her eyes away from beholding the blot that he made on her landscape. And in Hester, too, she was bitterly disappointed . . . . that one interview between them had not prepared her for a woman willing to sink into a mere hanger-on at the gates of the man who had wronged her, even if that man were so hardened in sin as to permit it . . . . and gradually the passionate bond of sympathy with Hester had slackened, and the longing to speak with her, to try and help her, died out in Madcap's heart, and nearly equal in guilt stood both man and woman in her eyes.

Perhaps the touch of ingratitude to herself shown in Hester's persistent avoidance of her, contributed to Madcap's sense of disappointment . . . . we find it so much more easy to forgive the sins of others when our forgiveness is specially entreated . . . . but this pair of sinners asked no man's absolution, and were even careful to parade their wrong-doing on the housetops, so that Madcap's attitude only faintly shadowed forth that sterner one of the whole county towards them.

'Wait till the Duke comes,' Mr. Eyre had said one

day when his attention had been drawn to some fresh slight to Frank; and within an hour had written a letter that he rode some ten miles to post, but which, oddly enough, was addressed to the Duchess, not the Duke.

But Madcap had little faith in Frank's rehabilitation now—it would be only whitewashing a sepulchre, she thought, as she looked down into the little ugly face of a green-man orchis that Dody had plucked out of the hedge and brought to her; and the ugliness of that little freaked representation of manhood showed handsomely to her beside the outward presentment of Frank's moral iniquity.

Behind her the hedge curved sharply on either side, so that she seemed to sit in a green elbow-chair, whence to gaze out at the moving panorama of life in the meadow beyond. Now and again, blown by a little puff of air, came from a neighbouring field the delicate perfume of blossoming beans, cresting all other scents as a minor key of music will separate itself from the louder chords around it to penetrate to the inmost sense and heart; and as Madcap leaned back, with Dody's green-man in her hands, she forgot Frank in a thought subtle and sweet as the scent itself.

There had lately come a change in her looks—the difference between a June rose steeped in sunshine, sparkling with dew, and a white musk rose, that in its Titania-like tender beauty woos us nearer to gaze at

the purity and softness of its petals; and it was this change in her that moved both the men's hearts as one, and set them shoulder to shoulder, to guard her against the mere possibility of harm.

And thus hedged round by a love vigilant, devoted as a mother's, it seemed as though no evil could reach her; but the intense strain, the ever-recurring dread, were becoming too much for even Mr. Eyre's iron frame, though he had not yet realised that, beyond a certain point, suffering might pass beyond his own control, or that physical effects of mental causes might take matters into their own hands and carry him beyond his will; but Frank observed many signs in him that escaped Madcap, and entreated him in vain to seek change of thought in travel.

Mr. Eyre, however, stood firm; he did not believe in running away from fate, he said, and Madcap was better at home; there was his book, too, that he was just then busy on, and if he could ward off those sudden fits of sleep that overpowered him at odd moments, he would be as well as ever.

Even to Frank he did not show what was in his mind; his habitual reserve made it easy to drop the veil as he pleased; but could Frank have looked within, he would have been appalled at the glimpse afforded. A proud man, hitherto above the necessity of lying, Mr. Eyre found his present life of dishonour and subterfuge worse than death; his freedom gone, with that sense of security in his life that he had so

keenly valued—fettered, powerless, the part that he had personated becoming harder to him each day—he might have exclaimed with Caussin, that he who loses conscience, has nothing left that is worth keeping.

But more dangerous than all, the events of the day on which he had come upon Hester at the maying had produced an effect on his mind that, sleeping or waking, was never effaced. Hester's attitude towards Madcap was that of revenge, and once given the opportunity she would tell the whole truth ; her pretended affection for the child being a device to hide her real object in remaining in the village.

At that very moment, when standing at a dozen paces from Madcap, his eye was caught and instantly fixed by a slight movement in the boughs of the hedge behind which she was sitting.

'See,' he said suddenly, 'there's danger yonder,' and instantly drew a pistol from his breast-pocket, and fired.

'Good God!' cried Frank, going forward, 'if it was Hester, you must have killed her!'

'Why not?' said Mr. Eyre, 'she had her warning ; and you'll go round to the other side of the hedge and see ; and don't be alarmed,' he added, in a different tone, as he took Madcap, who had started up, in his arms, and smoothed her hair. 'You didn't know I carried this pretty toy?' and he showed it her, smiling at the fear with which she touched it. 'It's for vermin ; sometimes those creatures harm what's

better than themselves, and killing is no harm; and a sinful heart does not *always* make feeble hand—see how firm mine is. And yet, Madcap, it was only a—a rook!'

She laughed, not detecting the poisoned imagination that jests amid tears; and at that moment Frank appeared, pale, and looking unlike himself.

'Well?' said Mr. Eyre, looking at him fixedly, and still holding his wife fast.

'You missed your aim,' said Frank, with an effort.

'But the intention was the same,' said Mr. Eyre, as he drew Madcap's hand in his arm. 'And now we'll go and eat strawberries—as Boteler says, "doubtless God might have made a better berry, but doubtless God never did"—and I'll never let you sit so close by a hedge again, Madcap. There are snakes abroad, and other dangerous creatures, but we'll protect you from them all—Frank and I.'

'*You* shall,' said Madcap, folding Mr. Eyre's right hand between her two slim ones; 'but I think'—and she looked up proudly at the young man who unwillingly walked beside her—'I can do without the protection of—Lord Lovel.'

CHAPTER III.

'What silence hides, that knowest thou.'

FROM that day the change in Mr. Eyre became still more marked, and though he was able to hide the

workings of his mind from Madcap, to Frank it became clear that he looked, moved, and spoke only by a series of continued efforts, his will seeming to have lost the command it had hitherto exercised over the impassible features and acute mind. And in truth the bitter sense that he no longer ruled his own fate crept like a blight over that proud spirit to which impotence meant dishonour; and while outwardly immersed in those peaceful pursuits and pleasures that had hitherto made the sum of his own and Madcap's happiness, inwardly his thoughts were inwrapped and inwoven like those thousands of snakes in the bed of the Ganges, of which Pliny speaks as writhing and twisting in ceaseless convolutions, yet never succeeding for one instant in freeing themselves from each other. He was a man haunted by strange echoes, as one who, walking in dense fog by the light of a lantern, and by chance turning, sees himself impressed on the fog in rude gigantic outlines that make him strange in his own eyes—exaggerated, monstrous, startling him with the thought of a dual existence in which each self is known to the other, though the link between the two is invisible. Strange impressions came and went in his mind—something that was not himself looked at him out of the inmost chambers of his soul, and impelled him to deeds of which he knew nothing. In this rousing of blind inward forces, his hand would involuntarily clench and lift itself, till awakened by the act, his will would assert itself, and question the

mind, that only gave him back uncertain replies, like a face that is reflected in a shivered glass. His sleep became fitful, and full of dreams. More than once he had found himself in some distant part of the house, not knowing how he had got there, and on waking, felt himself oppressed by that 'indication which we get, as it were, by accident, and without seeking for,' that has been defined as an omen.

His action in the hayfield—automatic, entirely without the ratification of his will—had appalled him. True, he had prepared himself for emergencies; but this demon that leaped to the helm and acted for him was unknown, unauthorised . . . . into what farther depths of crime it might plunge him he shuddered to guess at, and next day sent Frank to Hester, offering any terms she pleased, if she would only leave the village. But, alas! she had got beyond either him or Madcap now. . . . . the starved motherhood in her had found food, and nothing short of death should make her renounce it; and there was another reason why she must stay, one that drew her to the child with more idolising love each day, the outcast's heart recognising that to which the mother's was blind. She must stay now to the end, no matter in how great peril her life stood (and of Mr. Eyre's attitude towards her there could be no doubt since the day when, taking a covert peep at her darling, Mr. Eyre had spied and fired at her as an assassin); though if sometimes an alternative that offered safety with happiness

presented itself, she thrust it aside . . . . she would do nothing that could cause Madcap one moment's pain.

And if Mr. Eyre would only have realised it, Madcap ran no risk of harm from Hester, even if the latter had willed such to her; for life is made up of chances, and though we keenly note each untoward one, we are blind to the million atoms that work in our favour: since Nature, left to herself, plans things easily—it is only man who, by violent exercise of will, forces the currents of fate in a wrong direction.

He said little when Frank announced the failure of his errand, but each hour the sense of dependence upon the woman burned more deeply into his proud soul, as with bitter humiliation he secretly filled that pillory of shame in which the county, to a man, had united to publicly place Frank.

Even the farmers were against the lord of the manor, and reckoned him a hardened villain.

'Look at his complexion,' they would say to their wives, and perhaps it was this among other items that *did* make the women look at him—'do *that* look like lyin' awake at night and being sorry for his sins?' And yet he could look sorry and downcast enough on occasion, though Madcap, who had long ago discovered that fault in Frank's countenance before mentioned, would never admit that he showed the smallest sign of penitence. And, perhaps, the greatest strain upon Mr. Eyre's nerves came just then from his wife, whose scorn of Frank (usually at odd moments,

and when he was least suspicious of her intentions) showed itself in perpetual comparisons between Frank's moral depravity and his own speckless whiteness, till one day an unexpected ally of his father was discovered in Dody, who burst into tears, exclaiming that 'Frank was a dear, kind, beautiful mans, and never called mummy names, and loved her very much' —whereat, and probably it was for the first time in his life, Mr. Eyre caught up the child, and kissed him.

CHAPTER IV.

'Be bolde, be bolde, and everywhere be bolde.'

As Mr. Eyre rode through Lovel one morning about a week after his despatch of a certain letter, a pair of bright bays came whirling past, driven by a lady, who seemed as unconscious of his presence as though he and his horse had been fashioned out of mist.

'Duchess!' he said, not raising his voice, as she passed him. But the horses stopped like clockwork, and she looked up, without speaking, at the man who, in his black riding-cloak, showed—

'The regal port
And faded splendour wan,'

that in some minds is associated with the idea of Satan himself.

And so you are back again,' he said; 'and we're both married since we last met, for I think you and the Duke left immediately for abroad on our coming to settle here; so you've never seen my wife. Supposing you waive ceremony, and come with me to see her now?'

The firmly held reins suddenly slackened, and the woman who held them, looking up, and knowing her master, took the hand extended to her (for Mr. Eyre had already dismounted), and alighting, without a word walked beside him up the winding hill, her breath coming quick and short with the exertion, as though she had been hurried.

Mr. Eyre heard this, and drew her hand through his arm. As he did so, their eyes met.

'You have been missed,' he said; 'it was time you returned. And you won't find my wife very bright just now; those mutes at my father's funeral frightened her, I think. I've put it down in my will that she's to mourn me in *white*—if she mourns me at all,' he added, with a tone of mockery in his voice that misled her into the belief that, like all the Eyres, he had grown tired of his wife at last.

The Duchess was not bad. A woman who has profoundly loved but one man in her life seldom is; it may be doubted, too, if she ever heartily dislikes the man from the violence of whose love or enmity she may have suffered—what she can never be brought to pardon is his indifference, and there was none of

the latter in the glance just then bent upon this one by Mr. Eyre.

'We are neighbours,' he said, as they neared the house, 'and I mean that we shall be friends. Suppose you ask us to stay with you for a few days,' he added, pausing abruptly; 'I have fifty things to talk over with the Duke—and you,' he added, in a lower tone.

'I will ask your wife,' she said, recovering her self-possession as she spoke. But Madcap was nowhere to be found, though Mr. Eyre opened four or five doors in search of her. As he opened a sixth, something sprang out from just behind it, and, with a peal of laughter, hung round Mr. Eyre's neck, crying out:

'I'm hiding from my sweethearts; but I heard you coming, and I thought—' but here, seeing that Mr. Eyre was not alone, she stopped short, and retreated, putting up her hand to a ruffled head, and colouring brilliantly.

And so this was Mr. Eyre's Madcap, thought the Duchess, hardly breathing as she looked at her—this laughing, round-limbed young romp, whose hair, lips, and eyes laughed equally in the sunshine, with:

> 'All things else about her drawn
> From May-time and the cheerful dawn. . . .'

Perhaps it was the thought of how this same beauty had detached Mr. Eyre from another, and a very different style, that nerved her to go through the ceremony of introduction with apparent indifference.

'You *stealeded* away, mummy,' said a little voice at

the window in tones of reproach, and the Duchess looked round to see two miniature copies of the master of the house shyly approaching to hide themselves behind Madcap's white gown.

'Those children would content her if he died to-morrow,' thought the Duchess, as she preferred her request, and saw the dismayed look that flashed over Madcap's face, while she twined a hand closer about each little neck.

'Of course she will come,' said Mr. Eyre, cutting short Madcap's refusal; and then in some subtle way in which women understand each other, Madcap knew that her husband and this woman had been sweethearts once, and favoured by the infinite possibilities of life might be sweethearts again . . . . the thought made her proud in her attitude to the Duchess, as to Frank . . . . it is so easy for the untempted to assume those honours of virtue that are never really won, till wrested by an effort of supreme courage over the adversary; and in those days Madcap was harsh and unripe in her judgments, as was natural to her youth and inexperience. And perhaps that coldness of hers presaged forth the Duchess's triumph (for courage never doubts itself, or its powers), so that it was with a renewed sense of belief in the Eyre history that the Duchess presently departed, escorted to her pony carriage by Mr. Eyre himself.

'I am glad you are back,' he said abruptly, as he wrapped the light rug about her; 'and there's that

poor fellow Frank Lovel,' he added; 'you know I always loved him—and the talk about him is mere moonshine—and you'll help me with the Duke about it?' he added, as he put the reins in her hands, and forced her to look at him.

'I will try,' she said, speaking firmly, as she thought of her power in the county, 'but Colonel Busby has already been to see him.'

'Oh, Busby!' said Mr. Eyre, laughing. '"That best good man with the worst tempered muse;" but you'll get the Duke to reserve his judgment till to-morrow. You *can* influence him, and you *will*.'

'You seem to love Lord Lovel very much,' she said, turning her beautiful blonde head away.

'He is an old friend,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly; 'and I never forget old friends—do you?' he added, in a tone that sent the blood to her cheek, and the horses away at a gallop, so that Mr. Eyre got no reply; but did not seem to miss it as he went back in search of his wife.

It was a long hunt, but he found her at last investigating the gooseberry bushes as if her life depended on the ripening of the berries, and, most infallible sign of Madcap's being out of sorts, Dody and Doune conspicuous by their absence.

'Has your Duchess gone?' she said, not looking round.

'Yes.'

'Why did you not marry her instead of me?'

'Perhaps she preferred being a Duchess to Mrs. Eyre.'

'Did you ever ask her?' cried Madcap, turning round with flashing eyes, and stamping her little foot. 'Is *that* the woman for whom Lady Betty said you left me three whole months?'

'I never left you for her or any other woman in my life,' said Mr. Eyre. 'And *could* you be jealous?' he added suddenly.

'Try me,' she cried. 'And you?'

'I could play Othello to your Desdemona with a very good grace.'

'And kill me?'

'Ay, why not?

'"Kill what I love,
A savage jealousy that sometimes savours nobly. . . ."

It would be the most natural thing in life to kill you if you dared to love another man better than myself.'

He snatched her in his arms—then, as one suddenly remembering, held her more gently, and called himself a brute for making her so pale, and smoothed her hair, and even carried her into the house, but all the same, was inflexible in declaring that she must go with him next day.

'It is for Frank's sake,' he said, when he had bade her maid prepare everything, even to shoe-buckles, without plaguing her mistress; and then Madcap had started up out of his arms, crying passionately:

'Frank, Frank, it is always Frank! Am I not only

to be degraded by his company at home, but I must do something I hate to serve his interest abroad? You used to be careful enough to keep harm away from me . . . . and I may not go and speak to *her*, though she repents and he does not. He *can't* be sorry with that colour,' concluded Madcap, in so aggrieved a tone as to make Mr. Eyre break into a laugh that yet had but little mirth in it.

The Duke received Mr. Eyre warmly on their arrival next day, but this did not detain his guest, who, after a few words with the Duchess, followed Madcap upstairs; and as he clasped her necklace, and fastened a flower at her neck, showed such brilliant spirits as succeeded at last in chasing away her own sadness at leaving home.

'What do you think of her?' said the Duchess to her sister-in-law, Lady Sophia, whom, for some reason best known to herself, she had hurriedly asked to meet the Eyres.

'I'll tell you after dinner,' said Lady Sophia; 'but if you want my opinion of them as a pair, it strikes me that "les idées d'un tête à cheveux blondes ne sont pas celles d'une tête blonde."'

'The description hardly applies to Mr. Eyre,' said the Duchess coldly. 'I think him now, as always, the handsomest man I ever saw.'

Lady Sophia shrugged her shoulders.

'He has aged frightfully during the last three months,' she said, 'and seems to bear Frank Lovel's

sins vicariously. I saw the two men side by side in church last Sunday, and wondered how Mrs. Eyre could ever have hesitated between them.'

'She never did,' said the Duchess, walking to the window and looking out, 'that pretty-faced boy could be no rival to such a man as Mr. Eyre.'

'Pretty!' cried Lady Sophia indignantly; 'he has the most noble, generous, beautiful face in the world, and looks like an angel of light beside Mr. Eyre's blackness——'

'It is to be hoped Mrs. Eyre does not share your opinion,' said the Duchess carelessly, as they parted at the top of the stairs; but all the while Lady Sophia was dressing, she was puzzling her brains as to what story she had heard over half-a-dozen years ago about her sister-in-law—then Lady Julia Hayes—and Mr. Eyre. It could have been nothing scandalous; she was too carefully guarded for that. Nor could he have dared to use her ill; her birth forbade the idea. But here Lady Sophia erred, for when Mr. Eyre's admiration was aroused, the accident of birth counted for nothing, but the quality of the charms he coveted a great deal.

Perhaps Lady Sophia felt that she had been hasty in her pity for Madcap when Mr. Eyre led her in, the only whiteness about her furnished by her neck and arms, and no colour anywhere save on her lips and cheeks, and the little chestnut head in whose soft rings the red-gold lurked.

Perhaps, too, as she sat beside the Duke at dinner, bringing unaccustomed smiles to his lips, it occurred to him that there might be an order of beauty that in juxtaposition to that of his wife inevitably vulgarised the latter; and at the same moment Mr. Eyre, glancing at the woman who sat at the head of the table, asked himself if it were possible he had ever been attracted by such charms.

'Over-fed,' he thought, as his keen eyes rested on the voluptuous beauty of throat, neck, and arm; 'she is rapidly approaching the point where material sensations obliterate moral impressions, and is likely to fall a prey to her impulses, whether good or evil.'

'She is lovely,' said the Duchess, in a low tone later to Mr. Eyre.

'Is she?' he said indifferently; then thought of the lines:

> 'This tress and that I touch,
> But cannot praise—I love so much.'

His host showed great attention to Mr. Eyre throughout the early part of dinner; but on an accidental mention of Frank's name, closed his lips and remained ominously silent through the conversation that followed, though he did not take up the cudgels for Colonel Busby when Mr. Eyre vowed that, like Dryden's Shadwell, the latter never deviated into sense.

'He will win his game, whatever it may be,' thought Lady Sophia, as they rose from the table, and Mr.

Eyre held the door open for them to pass out, a different man to that of three hours ago—the dark, brilliant face fired with power and spirit, and lit by one of those rare smiles so well worth the wakening. Perhaps, in passing, his wife had called it forth, but the Duchess thought differently, and with throbbing heart turned aside to regain her composure. Madcap, with brows pressed against the window-pane, was thinking of the little faithful steps that next morning would go trotting to her door, confident of finding her within—a young child will sob over its mother's absence to-day, but refuse to recognise a similar to-morrow—and there were tears in her eyes as she turned to face her host's sister.

'Does he mean to break her heart over my sumptuous sister-in-law?' thought Lady Sophia indignantly, as she took Madcap's hand, and sat down beside her.

'I want my sweethearts,' said Madcap, smiling ruefully; 'I have never been away from them before' . . . . and somehow, from that moment Lady Sophia did not pity Madcap, but loved her as all others did, including Frank. But conversation with the Duchess was another affair, and the men sitting very late over their wine, Madcap begged to be excused, and went upstairs before they came in. She had not the heart to say a word about home to Mr. Eyre next morning, he looked so bright and well, had slept soundly, and knew he had regained that confidence in himself that lately had been on the brink of escaping him.

The danger to Frank, and his determination to overcome it, seemed to have called forth his whole force of character; his brains were in full activity, his wits brighter than ever; he was not to be recognised as the worn, constrained man of a week ago.

At breakfast the Duchess remarked carelessly:

'Have you any message to Lord Lovel, Mr. Eyre, as I am writing to him this morning, asking him to come to us for a few days?'

'Thank you, Duke,' said Mr. Eyre warmly, 'and you too, Duchess,' he added, turning to her, and rewarding her with a look, 'and I'll send a line with yours, if you please;' and then he turned to Madcap, who had coloured scarlet, and who had seen his look to the Duchess, and altogether felt a little strange, and as if she wanted Dody's arms round her neck to clear her brain.

'Perhaps he won't come,' said Lady Sophia, as a horseman set out an hour later on his ten miles' ride to Lovel.

'I *hope* he won't!' cried out Madcap vehemently.

'She is in love with him,' thought the Duchess, 'and is angry because that woman remains in the village. I think I see my way to——,' but even in her thoughts she committed herself no farther.

But when Frank himself (whom she had not seen for six years) appeared next day, she could not deny that a more charming sinner never won absolution for his sins by his looks, or help feeling (as many others

did) that any wrongdoing of his must proceed more from the excess of a generous heart than from the lack of it. To be sure, there was no shame in his face, and this might be taken as slightly unbecoming on his part; but that he could look downcast was quickly proved, when, on venturing to offer Madcap his hand, she overlooked it in a courtesy, and walked away. Even the Duke, but lately so implacable against him, felt for his discomfiture, and before he had been in Frank's company five minutes, succumbed to the fascination this young fellow seemed to exercise impartially over every man and woman with whom he came in contact, always excepting the one woman who had jilted him for his friend. At dinner, all save Madcap (who thought of Hester) were the brighter for his coming: his youth, his gaiety, the delightful tone of his voice, in which spoke the noble heart that looked out of his blue eyes, his very unconsciousness of his power to charm, warmed the Duke's heart to him more and more as the evening passed. Later, in the drawing-room, Madcap found herself subjected to an annoyance that she found intolerable. Mr. Eyre was in conversation with the Duchess; Lady Sophia had crossed over to the Duke to propose to him one of those endless family problems that no one has ever been known to solve satisfactorily; and Frank, with a determination that for the moment bereft him of the colour Madcap found so unbecoming, dared to approach the window behind whose curtain she stood half hidden.

Was her head drooping rather sadly? Frank thought so, till feeling some one near, she looked up, and then she seemed nearly as tall as himself, and as capable of brushing him from her path as a fly, and indeed had passed him, when he said—

'Dody says——'

Madcap stopped, trembling, and her hand stole up to the little mole on her neck. 'Have you seen him to-day?' she cried quickly.

'He sent you his dear love, and—other things,' said Frank, stopping short; 'and this,' he added, taking carefully out of his breast-pocket a little packet that had so clearly been tied up by Dody and Doune's fingers, that without a word, Madcap pounced on it, and ran out of the room, without a thought for anything on earth but what was inside that precious paper.

The Duchess, who had been near enough to see the whole thing, glanced at Mr. Eyre, and remarked—

'So much coldness, so much heat, and then a mysterious packet! Are you not jealous?'

Mr. Eyre's reply less concerned Madcap than the woman who addressed him; but even his determination scarcely enabled him to sustain with spirit the part he had marked out for himself, and on which Frank's success depended.

And meanwhile, Madcap had fallen sound asleep with tears on her cheeks, and a half-withered bunch of dog-roses and sweetbriar in her hand.

CHAPTER V.

'Like dew on the gowans lying
Is the fa' o' her fairy feet,
And like winds in summer sighing
Her voice is low and sweet.'

ONLY Madcap's feet were not flying, for she wore pattens, that clicked cheerfully as she went to and fro over the Dutch tiles of the Duke's model dairy.

It was Molly's dinner-hour, so Madcap had the place all to herself, and might dip her little forefinger into as many pans as she pleased, print a pat of butter without being despised, even give a few good turns to the churn, shutting her eyes to listen to the hollow splashing within, and that brought to her mind the days when she and Frank had tried their 'prentice hands in Lady Betty's dairy at making cheese.

All night she had been dreaming of him and her children . . . . somehow they were so entangled in her mind now; and waking in the silent watches, a clearer perception of his character, and the weight of the temptation beneath which he had fallen, was revealed to her, and she had been eager for the morrow, though when it came she had not courage to hold out her hand, and force herself within the ken of that slight glance in which he had included her in his morning greetings.

And afterwards he had disappeared with the Duke, while the Duchess had carried Mr. Eyre off to her

hot-houses; so that Madcap, having written a letter to her sweethearts, found herself alone, and wandered out on an expedition that ended in the forsaken dairy.

But presently she grew deaf to the splashing noise in the sense of desertion that filled her heart, and to some one who passed the door, the young shape in Molly's apron that leaned against the churn had a lonely, deserted look, so that he involuntarily made a step forward, as one may towards a child that one sees lost in perplexity or trouble.

He had come quite close to her before she knew of his presence; but when she looked up, he saw that in her eyes were tears that perchance had washed away the contempt for him that they usually held . . . . as they stood looking at each other, with quivering lips in that first trembling moment of reconciliation, perhaps there was danger to the two souls that swayed lightly to each other as two flowers in a summer breeze . . . . they were so young, so bound together by natural tastes and ties, and they loved each other so dearly . . . . and as Madcap timidly stretched out a little trembling hand, Frank stooped and kissed it, knowing that it had given him back his kingdom. When he had let it go, and they were standing apart, like two children, who could make up their quarrel, but were too shamefaced to speak of it, she said, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, 'I have been very wicked . . . . I could not forgive you

. . . . but perhaps God has . . . . and it was not for me to judge you . . . you are better than I am. . . .'

She had moved a little aside, as one who wishes no reply, and stood looking down on a dish of curds-and-whey, a faint smile of memory that struggled with tears crossing her lips.

'Do you remember how I used to make you steal Lady Betty's curds-and-whey, and how I always ate my own share and yours too?' she said.

'Those were happy days,' he replied sadly.

'But there is no Lady Betty to make us miserable now,' cried Madcap; 'and we will have happier ones yet!'

But Frank shook his head; he knew that no such happiness was possible—out of Arcadia. It is so easy for love, with both its hands full, to dictate to friendship, but the friend who wants a little love, not liking, to his share, is apt to look bitterly on his own side of the bargain.

'We are older now,' he said at last; and Madcap laid down her wooden spoon, and turned to look at him with a kind of wonder, that grew in her eyes as for the first time she recognised the lines of suffering and care that the last month had wrought in his features.

'Are we so old?' she said wistfully, as one suddenly alive to the value of something that is escaping him.

'Love is never old,' he said, not looking at her, 'and you have that in plenty; it is only the unloved who grow old.'

Looking up, Madcap somehow thought of his mother, and how she would have loved him. Perhaps her own motherhood bridged over the nearness of their years, as, stepping forward, and taking his hand between both her own, she said :

'But we all love you . . . . and there are others to love you, too . . . .' she added, then shrank away, like a child who has set its careless fingers on a half-healed wound. If there was a bitter tension about his lips as he turned and looked at her ; if he realised with what grace a woman will offer her basket of scraps to a starving soul, while hard by, a man will, unobserved, have laid down his last gold coin without a word, there was no bitterness in his eyes as he said :

'And I love you all, Madcap.'

'Dody loves you,' she said softly, and put up her hand to the sweetbriar, that sent out a faded whiff of sweetness, as if to remind her of the hand that had brought it.

'Yes,' said Frank, walking away to the open window ; 'and he is taken great care of . . . . did you see the marks of his kisses on the paper ? And I think his fingers left some smudges too. I told him that you were coming back soon, and he began at once to pick a nosegay to put on your table. He thought soon must mean to-morrow.'

'I have never been away from him in all his life before,' said Madcap, the slow tears gathering in her eyes, 'and——'

'Don't cry,' implored Frank distractedly; 'it will make you ill—and what will Mr. Eyre say?'

'Mr. Eyre will say nothing,' she said, balancing herself on her pattens with suddenly recovered dignity, 'he is with the Duchess . . . . did it ever strike you,' she added, as the impulses of her youth towards Frank recurred, 'that Mr. Eyre knew anything about *flirting?*'

Frank, considering Madcap, thought that she must have had some knowledge of the art to keep Mr. Eyre for six years tied to her apron-string, but said, 'She is his hostess—he cannot be rude to her.'

'A pretty pair,' said a low but audible voice in the doorway behind them.

At sound of it Madcap's mood changed; without turning, she said, 'Would you like some curds-and-whey, Frank?' and gravely filled the wooden spoon and held it out to him.

'Quite an idyl!' said the Duchess, entering just as Frank, fed by Madcap, swallowed a liberal mouthful, but could not even be made to look ridiculous by the absurdity of the situation.

'Quite,' said Madcap indifferently; 'would you like some more?' she added, looking at the young man with a smile.

'To be sure,' said Frank, who hated curds-and-whey, but would have eaten any abomination she might please to offer him.

'Madcap,' said Mr. Eyre's stern voice at a dis-

tance, 'you will fall off your pattens—what madness!'

'Frank is looking after me,' said Madcap, waving her empty spoon airily; 'go and look after the Duchess. Don't let her wear pattens; she's too tall and too—plump,' she added, looking at her hostess gravely from head to foot; 'but I think you may take off mine now, Frank;' and Mr. Eyre's last glimpse of his wife as he turned away, was with Frank kneeling before her, carefully unfastening their straps.

'You are jealous,' said the Duchess to Mr. Eyre, as he walked beside her over the velvet turf to the house.

'Not I; but I was thinking'—he paused and looked at her with a glance beneath which she trembled—'what a pity you and I did not marry after all, and leave that young pair yonder to be as happy as two children together; and perhaps now you understand better why she is called Madcap.'

CHAPTER VI.

'To act is so easy, to think is so hard.'

WHEN Mr. Eyre had told his wife that he must propitiate the Duchess for Frank's sake, and Madcap had shrunk from this first glimpse of the unscrupulousness of his character, he had not taken into account the danger of playing at pitch-and-toss with a human

heart, and before long found himself committed to very different issues to those he had intended. A child may kindle a great fire, but fifty grown men cannot stay it; and before Mr. Eyre had been at the White Lodge three days he knew that even for Frank's sake he ought not to have gone there.

The smallness of the party, the isolation of a great house at a time of year when all associates of the master and mistress in the county were absent, while unprivileged visitors found themselves rigidly excluded, conspired to throw the young couple and the older one so constantly together, that gradually Madcap's shyness with Frank ceased, and she could talk to him almost as naturally as in the days when they were boy and girl together. But to Frank, who could not be expected to know Mr. Eyre's character as well as Mr. Eyre knew it himself, the situation was dangerous, and full of anxiety. He had ceased to count Madcap's husband a strong man, regarding his attitude to Hester as alike bigoted and indefensible, and dreading some fresh weakness by which his wife's happiness might be endangered; though she, fed in secret by a more passionate devotion than ever, would not stoop to be jealous of the Duchess, and was never sad save when she thought of her children. But when she gathered that there was not a trait of beauty and sweetness about Dody that Frank had not observed, he and she were so drawn together that thenceforward there was no lack of discourse between them.

And on the fourth day, when Frank was riding to Lovel (meaning to return the same day), Madcap, who had come out to see him depart, said, very truly, that she would have liked to go with him on a pillion, so that all the way he seemed to feel her two little hands clasped below his heart, and her bright head leaning in safety against his shoulder.

She knew that the business on which he had excused himself to the Duchess was to visit a certain nursery, and deliver and receive important messages; and it was to receive these latter that she was very early dressed for dinner, and watching from the billiard-room window for his return, ready to run out the moment she heard his horse's steps.

But it happened that his arrival was simultaneous with that of a new guest—a gossip of the highest quality—who saw the greeting between the two young people, and supposing them husband and wife, thought such warmth vastly ill-bred. She had better hopes of them later, especially when she discovered the young man to be that identical 'nettle for nice noses' whose wrongdoings just now furnished the last new dish of scandal for the county.

She thought he must be either a fool of extraordinary simplicity, or a man of brilliant courage, to select the wife of an Eyre as his next fancy; and at dinner became so fascinated in her study of the pair, that the attitude of matters between Mr. Eyre and the Duchess for the time absolutely escaped her attention.

'My dear Duchess,' she said, in the drawing-room later, 'I wonder you permit such open love-making between Lord Lovel and Mrs. Eyre.'

'Oh, they are old friends!' said the Duchess, 'and sweethearts,' she added a little bitterly, for she was beginning to suspect Madcap's charms of being more binding on Mr. Eyre than her own.

'They met like lovers,' said Mrs. Transome, shrugging her shoulders; 'and she has gone into the garden. See if he does not join her.'

The Duchess's heart beat as she thought that if these two young people were abroad there would be an excuse for herself and Mr. Eyre to follow them . . . . and Mrs. Transome, taking the place of Lady Sophia (who had left that day), could play backgammon with the Duke.

And, indeed, when Frank appeared, he only gave one hasty look round, and disappeared through the open window into the soft darkness beyond. In the garden nothing was visible, when his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, save some pale cuckoo-coloured masses of bloom, that drew him nearer by their penetrating sweetness, and over which for one brief moment he bent, not knowing them for the stocks, that by day in their pinched, starveling ugliness had offended the eye of the gazer.

When Frank had almost given up his search, the whiteness of her neck showed her to him, as she stood beside a bush of the large evening primrose—that

curious flower which resists the sun's magic, closing itself firmly at his approach, but opening out her sweetness to the evening dews with a sudden leap, a quiver that well may startle the bee-moth that has fallen asleep in her breast.

'Hush!' said Madcap, feeling rather than knowing that Frank stood beside her; 'if you speak loud they will not unfold. . . . I have been watching them and thinking of Keats's lines . . . .'

They stood for awhile without speaking by the opening flowers that seemed to bring with them their own light, while the night-wind blew to them, now and again, a little intense whiff from the distant stocks; then she said—

'Do they miss me? . . . . were they in the nursery, or picking a nosegay, thinking I should come back to-morrow?'

'I found them in the copse,' he said, with a little pause before he spoke; 'they were quite happy. But when they saw me they ran up, clamouring to know if you had come back.'

'And what did you say?' said Madcap, stooping over a cluster of stars fast fading in their masses of heavy foliage.

'That you would not be long now; but that did not satisfy Dody—he clung round her neck and asked if *soon* meant to-day?'

'Round whose neck?' said Madcap jealously; 'he never cared for Josephine——'

'It was not Josephine,' said Frank, his voice sounding as though he were moving away and had left her all alone. For the garden was almost in darkness now —the night had taken its revenge and extinguished those colours that flamed most vividly by day—scarlets, blues, and pinks were now but black shadows, and only the ghosts of the evening primroses gave a vague suspicion of their presence.

'Was it—was it *Hester?*' said Madcap in a whisper, that barely expected a response.

'Yes,' replied a voice but a little way off, 'her heart is bound up in him—she lives but in his life, and she watches over him in your absence as only you could do—but she does not usurp your place.'

For awhile there was silence, and his whole soul yearned to her, knowing that she was weeping; then she said—

'There are things that even God does not meddle with . . . . like the growing seed, or hindering a human soul to become good in its own way . . . . and she is good. . . .' Her hand stole out to his in the darkness, and so in mute accord they moved towards the light, consecrated to each other, he by his sacrifice for her, she by her old love for him, and new passionate desire for his repentance.

'They have the faces of angels,' said Mrs. Transome in a low voice to the Duke, as the two entered; 'but even angels may trip and fall sometimes, and nobody ought to know that better than—Satan.'

She nodded towards Mr. Eyre as she spoke, who looked singularly old and haggard in contrast with the two beautiful young people; and as if her thought had reached him, Mr. Eyre suddenly looked at himself in a mirror opposite, then at the two—and a curious idea took possession of his mind.

CHAPTER VII.

'Such a getting up stairs never was seen.'

THAT evening was the last in which Mr. Eyre and the Duchess, his wife and Frank, were virtually alone; for within three days the house was filled with those persons that Mr. Eyre had prompted the Duchess to invite, flavoured by a sprinkling of brighter wits from town—these latter expressly born (as the county magnates supposed) to teach solid men the inestimable value of their own slow understandings.

There was scarcely a man there who had not known and loved Frank's father, and gradually he made his way with each; for the wives' judgments were always in his favour, and on all sides the verdict that he had been more unfortunate than sinning was returned.

And indeed, to the women, Frank was the central figure of the house, as Madcap, unconsciously to herself, was to the men, producing an unexpected effect on their minds, and almost inclining them to the belie that as human beings are divided into three classes—

men, women, and Herveys—so there might be a fourth class, of which Madcap was a representative.

She had no taste for flirtation—perhaps she was a total abstainer from birth, having loved but once, and once only, and so escaped any dregs of the poison that might be lingering in her system; and when certain county Lovelaces, presuming on Mr. Eyre's undisguised flirtation with the Duchess, offered their thinly-veiled admiration, something that was neither woman nor child flashed out of her eyes, and checked them.

For men are but what women make them, as in their turn they imprint their features, whether base or noble, on what they deal with, and the mere recognition of a pure woman will shed an influence in ever-widening circles upon the souls of men who have painfully taught themselves that no such creature exists. But the wives, who quickly fathomed Frank's attitude towards her, said that it was easy for a woman secretly so adored to decline ordinary flirtations; there was a general conviction too that Mr. Eyre was amusing the Duchess rather than himself, being too finished a man of the world to display in public his profound affection for his wife. And meanwhile Madcap tired of it all, and longed for a sight of her children, of whom she had not received so much as a message for two whole days. Frank's position was now established, and why would not Mr. Eyre take her away? She did not know that each hour, however

little spent to his liking, was a breathing space to him before the struggle that must commence on his return to Lovel; that here he felt himself independent as his fellow-men, *there* he was a slave fast chained and bound by the weight of those sins from which it was beyond the power of either God or man to loose him now.

He felt as a criminal who, with sentence of death upon him, is permitted to wander, for a brief season, wheresoever he wills; or as a boy who, playing truant, forgets the unlearned lesson that will stare him in the face when to-morrow he returns unwillingly to school. And though he felt and knew Madcap a little estranged from him (for while sure of his love, the touch of unscrupulousness she had discovered in his character had sunk him in her estimation, and it was less as disciple than judge that her clear eyes now and again met his), yet he would not hurry himself to please her, and she must go hungry for a sight of her darlings, for he knew that if he once took her over to see them, it would be beyond his power to persuade her back again to the White House.

But when the Eyres had been about ten days there, it happened one morning, for some reason inscrutable to middle-aged minds, that two young people chose to get up very early, though naturally the woman was first in the field; she had even time to wash her face in the dew before she chanced upon the humble cause of the disasters of that fatal day—the *Deus ex machinâ*

in this case being an ass, who had no idea of any higher destiny than to carry the gardener's wife once a week to market, where she disposed (independently of her husband) of such green-stuffs as she had herself filched during the week from his Grace's kitchen-garden.

Being in a certain sense contraband, like his wares, he occupied an out-house, into which, by mere chance, Madcap happened to look; and being struck by a wakefulness in his glance that hinted at an older acquaintance with the dawn than her own, she approached him with a carrot that Providence had placed just beyond his reach, and so established a bond of sympathy between herself and him.

She regarded him affectionately while he ate it, thinking of those long-distant jaunts in which she and Frank had been used to indulge. . . . Somehow she seemed to be always looking back now, not forward, and many of her staid ways were vanishing in the delightfully youthful influence that Frank had brought into her life.

Glancing round, her eyes fell on an old side-saddle, with bit and bridle beside it; and almost before any definite idea had formed itself in her mind, she had picked the saddle up, and laid it across the ass.

He took the proceeding quite naturally, and when she had saddled and bridled him, walked of his own accord to a block of wood at a little distance, upon which she might mount, and so reach his back. This

she did, and rode out of the doorway, with a pleasant sense of going no-whither, yet with a chance of adventure that warmed her young blood, and made her think with fine pity of the souls she had left sunk deep in slumber behind the shuttered windows of the house yonder.

Now the ass was accustomed to follow one invariable path, which led by cross cuts and unexpected lanes to the market town of Marmiton, so that presently Madcap, who had abandoned herself to his will, found herself jogging along in a direction that seemed familiar to her; and all at once, with a thrill of delight, perceived that she was on her slow way to Lovel.

It had been the longing to see Dody and Doune that had kept her waking half the night, and brought her out so early, and now—a look of inspiration flashed into her eyes—why should she not go to them? The ass plodded determinedly on; relieved of that dread of being expected to trot, which is the distinguishing characteristic of his race, he was honestly bent on reaching Marmiton in good time, and if he had known of a Providence, would have thanked it for the unusual lightness of the burden on his back.

So Madcap, not without some backward thought of Mr. Eyre, but with a vague feeling that the ass was more to blame than herself, ambled along between the fresh hedgerows, realising that Nature in undress far outmatches in charms Nature equipped at all

points for conquest . . . . felt that the first wan cloud in the sky, the first sharp scent in the air, the first sound (almost harsh in the intense, pure air) of life in the hedge, struck chords in her soul that more closely touched pain than pleasure . . . . it is when the breath of God has faded from the morning, when we only see it in its dimmed purity and silence, that we are able to regard it as a mere accidental arrangement of form and colour, only made beautiful by our own perceptions. . . .

For the first two miles, Madcap scarcely thought of her children, and not at all of herself—she was tasting one of those new experiences to which youth lends itself so graciously . . . . but in the third mile something set her off laughing, and after that she was just herself, though rather tired, for the saddle was hard, and the too-willing jog, jog of the ass set up a running accompaniment of bumps that made her long to descend, though doubts as to how she was to get up again kept her in her seat. She was growing hungry too, and had not passed a single farmhouse, or met so much as a cowherd, and when her attitude in the saddle was becoming a somewhat bowed one, perhaps she was not sorry to hear in the distance a sound as of human approach. But suddenly the pangs of hunger receded, and a sense of fun and frolic seated her firmly, while with one hand she drew over her head and face the white hood that hung on her shoulders; for she felt that this swift, nervous tread

was no yokel's, but that of a man as bent on enterprise as herself, and she drew her hood closer, smiling in her sleeve at the thought of how Mr. Eyre, wakening, had set out in hot pursuit, intending to bring her back.

She felt the footsteps approach, then slacken beside her, but keeping her face to the hedgerow, consoled herself by thinking that one woman's white gown is so like another . . . . and there was not an inch of countenance visible to which even a husband might swear.

But a pair of feet may sometimes have a distinct physiognomy of their own, and those slender ones of Madcap, high and dry on the ass's side, struck the beholder with a sense of familiarity that arrested his steps, and sent his keen glance over the lines of her shape, and the little ungloved hand that held the reins.

'Can you tell me the way to Lovel?' he said, respecting her evident wish not to be observed, yet convinced that this was Madcap, and Madcap bent on serious mischief, since she would not take even him into her confidence.

She gave a slight start, for the voice was different to what she had expected; but this was no more than natural in a young woman who found herself addressed by a stranger; and the slight trembling in her body afterwards might well have been indignation, and not laughter at his expense.

But she did not reply, and Lord Lovel waited.

'What a persistent young man,' she thought, as he kept step with the ass, 'no doubt he thinks I am some pretty young woman that he may as well amuse himself with . . . . and I thought he never flirted—except seriously,' she added, thinking of Hester.

She did not know that he suspected her identity, but guessed that if he did, he would persuade her to turn back, and this she was resolute not to do; so that between her obstinacy and his patience they ambled on for full half a mile without a syllable, till Frank, quite certain of her now, but growing uneasy at her silence, tried to take the hand that held the hood so closely together, and for his pains got a sudden, sound, stinging box on the ear.

Perhaps the shock of it momentarily took away his sight, at any rate, he got no glimpse of the features of his assailant, who returned to the study of her hedgerow with fresh satisfaction, feeling sure that she had now left her unwelcome escort no alternative but to withdra w.

'Madcap,' he said reproachfully, 'where are you going, and why don't you speak to me?'

She began to reflect that they were now more than half-way to Lovel, and that he could not hinder her much. . . . .

'Were you going to fetch me news of Dody?' she said, turning a young face full of relenting over her shoulder. 'Well, I'm going to fetch some myself, and you can go back and tell Mr. Eyre!'

'Then he does not know!' exclaimed Frank.

'Are middle-aged people ever wakened up by the sun shining in on them?' she said inconsequently: then coloured vividly, and added:

'If they will let me go—my sweethearts, I mean—perhaps I'll be back to-night in time for dinnner!'

But Frank, alive to the fact that he was unexpectedly placed on guard, and must not lose sight of her till she was safe in her husband's hands, was too perplexed to reply. If he turned back immediately, he could hardly arouse Mr. Eyre and bring him on before Madcap should have reached home, where ill-luck might possibly contrive that meeting with Hester which Mr. Eyre dreaded; but as he elected to go forward with her, he knew that scandal would follow at their heels.

'Madcap!' he said desperately, 'won't you come back with me? and your husband and I will take you home this very morning, to stay at home or not, just as you like; it is not suitable that you should return in this way, or—or polite to the Duchess,' he added.

'Oh, she will be happy enough with Mr. Eyre,' said Madcap, turning her head aside.

'Madcap!' he cried, 'you cannot be so foolish as to be jealous of—*her?*'

Madcap hung her head a moment, then looked round with a little smile hovering about her lips . . . . pretended jealousy always ends in mirth, as real jealousy in tears. . . . .

'Have you been pitying me, too?' she said. 'You

need not, for if I had only a crust of bread, and a drink of milk, I should be the happiest woman on earth at this moment!'

'I will get you both, Madcap,' he said, 'if you will let me take you to a farmhouse, and leave you there while I go back for Mr. Eyre.'

'Did ever you play truant, Frank?' she said, considering him gravely; 'and just as you were beginning to enjoy yourself, did you run back to your schoolmaster? I wonder people don't give their balls, and have their junketings early in the morning, when they are fresh, and feeling and looking their very best,' she added meditatively, as she sniffed at a flower here, and plucked a blossom there; 'and if one took a cow—look!' she cried suddenly, 'there is one coming;' and to Frank's great delight, he perceived that behind the animal there walked a woman.

She was rather a promising specimen of her class, and when Frank begged a draught of milk for Madcap, she sat down without more ado, and sent the milk foaming into the pail, then lifted her stout arm, and contrived that Madcap should drink it, so that Frank, who had dropped behind, imagined that he was not missed.

But when Madcap had thanked the woman, and moved on, she turned her face to the hedgerow and smiled, for being less hungry, her spirits were now returning.

'Frank,' she said, when a little out of breath with

running he overtook her, 'I'm going to pick you a nosegay, but you mustn't look round, and you're to walk straight on and not turn your head *once*.'

Misled by the innocence of her tone, he promised, and walked ahead, whereupon she slipped nimbly off the ass, and ran noiselessly over the grass to where in a bend of the road she saw the milkmaid standing, looking down at something she held in her hand, and talking to herself aloud.

'The bit of gold 'll buy me a new rig-out for the fair,' she muttered, 'and I'll beat Sukey yet, and pr'aps Garge 'll fancy me now, and all for just taking a bit of a letter up to His Grass's!'

Madcap pounced on the scrap of paper like a swallow who takes his sip of water flying, then with her slender fingers closed the astonished woman's red hand over the gold, and ran back to the ass, who waited where she had left him; while Frank, honourably disappearing, had not once turned his head round if the back of it might be trusted to speak truth.

'It is pleasanter walking,' she said, when she called him back, and he accepted unsuspiciously the apology for a button-hole she gave him, and for a mile led the ass happily enough, while she walked beside him, and they talked of everything but the subject nearest to the hearts of both—Hester.

But at the cross-roads, the ass created an unexpected diversion by refusing to budge save in the direction of Marmiton, so that the contest ended in Frank's lifting

the animal bodily, and carrying him a good step down the road to Lovel, along which he presently jogged, a sadder if not a wiser beast.

But when in the distance Madcap saw the morning sun shining on her home, she was in such haste to be there, that, having mounted her steed, she felt each step a weariness till they reached the village, which was already awake, and hurrying to its doors to see the young mistress riding by in a white gown and garden hat, on a donkey, with young Lord Lovel to hold its bridle, and not a sign of Mr. Eyre visible either before or behind.

Never was there a more unsuspected elopement, never a sedater home-coming, than this famous one which was destined to set the county in a blaze of controversy, and gave birth in time to a tragedy that froze all hearts.

But Madcap had no forebodings as she ascended the hill; her whole soul was on stretch to get to the children, and her face (pale now from fatigue) became radiant as, alighting, they crossed the courtyard and heard Dody's voice above.

'They are awake,' she cried, and ran up the stairs as quick as light, and with a lovely look at Frank, placed her finger on her lips, and softly opening the inner door, looked in.

He wondered what made her stop short, and press both hands to her heart, and on approaching, thought the scene within as home-like and peaceful as heart

could wish; and was vaguely reminded of some exquisite picture that he had seen of the Virgin-Mother and her child . . . . for Hester sate in the embrasure of the window, with Dody half-dressed on her knee, and as she fitted a sock to his foot, stooped to kiss the little rounded limb, at which he laughed, and twined his hand in her beautiful hair . . . . but with a bitter sense of being supplanted, Madcap ran forward, all the jealousy of her heart crying out in her as she uttered his name; nor when he struggled out of Hester's arms, and ran to her in an ecstasy of love, could she suffer her own joy to overflow in a look or word of kindness to the poor outcast who stood trembling beyond, realising that she had been but a pretender to the inheritance to which the rightful heir had come. . . .

For one yearning moment Hester looked at Madcap, then slowly, without a glance at Dody or at Frank, turned away . . . . and so the opportunity that both had so long desired passed, and the moment that might have made faithful to each other these two gradually estranged, noble hearts, went by for ever.

'Why did you not speak to her?' said Frank reproachfully, as the door closed on Hester.

But Madcap, overworn, untrue to her own self, as much perhaps through weakness as from ignoble jealousy, had fallen forward in a dead faint, with her arms round Dody's neck.

CHAPTER VIII.

'The bonniest lass in a' Glasgow town,
This day is awa' wi' a Hieland laddie.'

TWO empty chairs set side by side at the Duchess's breakfast-table that morning excited some comment, but chiefly of a good-natured kind, till the butler volunteered the fact that Lord Lovel and Mrs. Eyre had gone out very early, neither valet nor maid having seen them that morning. All eyes were turned on Mr. Eyre, who remarked that the young people had probably extended their ramble farther than they had intended; and if Mrs. Transome whispered to her next neighbour, and some of the men exchanged glances, his absence of alarm could not fail to check any idea that there was something wrong.

But when the morning passed, and Mr. Eyre, returning late to luncheon from visiting some outlying farms with the Duke, found that Madcap had not returned, his bearing changed, and an expression of acute anxiety crossed his face.

'They must have met with some accident,' he said, blaming himself bitterly that he had taken her absence so calmly; and without pausing to taste food, or even speak to the Duchess, he went out, though with no fixed plan in his mind of where he should seek her. Mrs. Transome shrugged her shoulders, as the Duke, deeply concerned, hurried after his guest to propose a systematic search for the missing pair.

'It is the man's own fault,' she said. 'What else did he expect? He throws two charming young people into each other's arms, and then wonders at their falling in love—to say nothing of his doing his best to make her jealous,' she added in a lower tone, as she glanced at the Duchess, who was very pale, and had taken no part in the discussion.

She believed that it was jealousy of herself which had driven Madcap into such folly, and secretly exulted in this proof of her power over Mr. Eyre . . . . and yet his whole soul seemed engrossed in the search for his wife, while he had left *her* without a glance.

The usual routine of the house was entirely broken up that day. No one either walked, drove or rode; the women tore the scandal to tatters over their needlework, while the men discussed it more calmly in the smoking-room, though to Mrs. Transome was reserved the brilliant idea of writing a full, true, and particular account of the elopement to four or five of her most particular gossips in the county. The post left early, so that she was able to despatch her letters before there was a chance of hearing of an honourable issue to the affair; and by the following mid-day the story was bruited about from one end of the county to the other, spiced by such lying additions as every scandal knows how to gather to itself as it flies.

And meanwhile Mr. Eyre, having gone a few steps without any definite aim, stopped suddenly, and burst

out laughing. 'Why, Duke,' he exclaimed, what a fool I have been—of course, she's gone to Lovel to see those boys of hers, and Frank's taken care of her. You know he's walked over several times, and ridden back.'

'But she could not walk that distance,' objected the Duke, who had considered Mr. Eyre's conduct as regarded the young people very unwise. 'I'll ride over with you, and see. It may put a better face on things.'

'Do you think they have run away?' said Mr. Eyre, smiling. 'I see you don't know my wife, or Frank either.'

'They are young,' said the Duke gravely; and no more was said till the horses were saddled, and they were on their way, when Mr. Eyre showed such brilliant spirits as even to infect the Duke with his gaiety; and they were both laughing heartily when, about half-way to Lovel, they met Frank, tearing along at full gallop.

He looked pale and weary, but his face brightened at the sight of Mr. Eyre; and as he checked his horse, he exclaimed: 'I feared my note to you had miscarried, so was riding over to fetch you.'

'Madcap is safe and well?' cried Mr. Eyre, made uneasy by Frank's looks.

'She is safe at the Red Hall,' said Frank; 'but she overfatigued herself this morning, and now she is ill.'

'How could you let her undertake such a journey?' exclaimed Mr. Eyre sharply.

'She was half-way to Lovel before I overtook her, or even knew she was abroad,' said Frank.

'And she had *walked* five miles?' cried Mr. Eyre.

'No,' said Frank; 'she was riding a donkey. I think it belonged to you,' he added, turning to the Duke, with a smile and look that convinced the older man he was speaking truth, and had very unwillingly taken part in the morning's escapade.

'And is she *very* ill?' said Mr. Eyre; but scarcely waiting for a reply, dashed his spurs into his horse's sides, and with a word to the Duke, set off at a hard gallop for Lovel.

* * * * *

'MY DEAR MRS. BUSBY' (wrote Mrs. Transome late that night),

'I am now able to tell you the end of this shocking affair, which has turned out better than could have been expected. It seems the runaways had got no farther than Lovel; some people say they had gone to fetch her two children, of whom both he and she are extravagantly fond, others that they actually meant to hide at the Tower (for fear Mr. Eyre would kill them both—you know what an awful man he is); but, fortunately, the Duke, who had ridden over with Mr. Eyre, managed to avert bloodshed, and got her away from Lord Lovel, so now she is up at the Hall, very ill, as well she may be; but as her husband has taken her back, I suppose we must put up with her. I send this in the strictest confidence, knowing that you never repeat anything. . . .'

And it was this venomous version of poor Madcap's thoughtless prank that came to be accepted as gospel truth through the length and breadth of the county.

CHAPTER IX.

'On eagles' wings immortal scandals fly,
While virtuous actions are but born to die.'

MR. EYRE found Madcap stretched on a sofa, looking so pale and wan that he could only consider the consequences to herself of her mad prank, without troubling himself at all as to what people might think of the prank itself.

He thought she received him a little coldly; but being conscious of some offence towards her of late, he did not let this trouble him, and had more than half won her back, when next morning he said he must leave her for a few hours, that he might make her apologies, and his own excuses, to the Duchess.

Meanwhile, he said, Frank and the children would keep her company in the drawing-room (whither he himself had carried her, she being now much rested, if only a wraith of her usual self), and to this Madcap eagerly assented; for the momentary wrong she had done Hester lay heavily on her soul, and she passionately desired to send some word that would show herself in less mean colours.

'You shall go, on one condition,' she said, as he

stooped his head to her—and half-unconsciously she noticed how grey he had lately grown—'that when you come back you will grant me any single request I may ask. Is that agreed?'

He promised her lightly, much as once she had promised him something, and till now kept her word; then rode away, and she could not even pretend to a feeling of a jealousy at his departure, she was so sure of her undivided empire over his heart.

But Frank did not come that afternoon, though Mr. Eyre had written to bid him, and, indeed, produced a sensation in the Duchess's circle when he said, having made his wife's apologies and his own—

'Lord Lovel would have ridden over with me, but he is keeping my wife company till I go back. You'll see him, no doubt, by evening.'

Mrs. Transome gasped, as she looked at this so-called man of the world, who acted so precisely like a fool; though when the Duchess had accidentally drawn him to the conservatory, an idea, worthy of the brain that originated it, occurred to her.

'Collusion,' she said to herself; 'and *we* are to be conveniently blind.' And a third edition of the scandal was penned and posted that very afternoon to her gossips.

When Mr. Eyre returned to his wife, she reminded him of his promise.

'What is it?' he said, his hold on her relaxing, as somehow Hester recurred to his mind.

'I want to go to her,' she said, with her arms close round his neck; 'I've forgiven Frank, but I want her to forgive *me*. . . . .'

He started up as though an adder had stung him, and the devils temporarily cast out in his breast returned sevenfold. So not only was he to be Hester's slave, but Madcap must be dependent on her good-will likewise . . . . for a moment his courage quailed at the miserable situation, the next he turned to his wife, and said:

'It is not fit that you should associate with such a woman—you owe some respect to yourself and me.'

But Madcap, weak and unstrung, with something of the sick child's longing after a forbidden toy, only hid her face, crying, 'You promised me; and if I see her, I must speak to her.'

'And so I am not sufficient to you,' he said, pausing before her, 'and you long for change; even your children don't content you, and my wishes count for nothing.'

'Have you studied mine?' exclaimed Madcap, feeling more real anger towards him than she had ever done before. 'Hester is a far nobler, better, more fit companion for me than your friend the Duchess, whom you forced me to visit——'

'I am the best judge on that point,' said Mr. Eyre; then abruptly changed the conversation, and though more devoted to her than ever, would not suffer her to even approach the subject with him again.

And, meanwhile, the county looked upon Mr. Eyre as a man who deliberately connived at his own dishonour, and who, for sufficient reasons, encouraged his wife's companionship with Lord Lovel on every possible occasion.

He had never troubled himself to explain his wife's untimely ride to Lovel—explanations of all kinds he cordially abhorred; and so long as he was satisfied, it did not occur to him to think that anyone else could be otherwise.

Frank's account of it (in the nature of things) was not believed, while Madcap was not even aware of the grave misdemeanour she had committed, and if she had been called on to blame anybody, would have blamed the ass; while the Duke and Duchess, who had set out for Scotland immediately after their party had broke up, were not at hand to give a true version of the story.

The few persons who did not accept the current one, and who, being old, were merciful, said that perhaps a middle-aged man like Mr. Eyre could not understand that two young, high-spirited people, drawn together by the eternal law that inclines like to like, might in time come to prefer each other's society to his.

And I suppose that such a thing as falling out of love with a person for no particular reason, just as one may suddenly tire of a food or an occupation that has satisfied one for years, is natural enough. Uncon-

sciously to ourselves, little things—trifles even—may have been undermining a person in our regard, and one day we awaken with a shock to the knowledge that what we most valued has forfeited our regard; that by no conscious volition of our own he has been tried by a secret tribunal within us, and sentence passed upon him; so that it is a corpse only that occupies the place of the living object of our worship of yesterday, and deeply as we may regret it, passionately as we may seek to recall our tenderness for it, we cannot bring it back to life again, for love and it have died together.

If Madcap had no such sense of falling out of love with Mr. Eyre, it was, nevertheless, certain that she realised the charm of youth in Frank more vividly than she ever dreamed of. He came to supply a half-understood want in her life that had often saddened her, for while her whole soul reposed itself on Mr. Eyre's love and strength, the gaiety natural to her years and character never found free vent in his presence; and her pleasure in Frank's company was that struggling out in her of repressed mirth that had always made her so bright and beloved a companion to her children—laughter and jests that may have no meaning to older years, are natural and easy to young spirits who look out upon life with clear eyes and unshadowed hearts, that meet happiness half-way, and to whom the hues of sunshine are more natural than those of night.

Only to Frank the attitude of matters was less pleasant. If he could, for an hour, throw himself into her brilliant happiness, he afterwards suffered long hours of anguish that brought the sweat to his brow —he was but a man, and he must love her all in all, or not at all . . . . her very virtues to her husband, her exquisite devotion to her children, but made him love her the more passionately, as thinking of what a wife she would have made himself . . . . the cruellest thrust with which a woman can stab a discarded lover's heart is when, in after years, she shows herself a wife beyond temptation, a mother more beautiful in her motherhood than she ever was to him in the heyday of his youth and fancy.

At about this time, but for his solemn promise to Mr. Eyre, Frank would have run away—he could tell a lie to save Madcap, but to act the part of her playfellow and friend was another matter, and, unfortunately, entertained a fine conviction that he would have made her a far better husband than Mr. Eyre had ever done.

If he had flamed out once to her face, and told her that God makes man and woman, but the devil invents the cant-word of friendship between two of opposite sexes and similar ages, she might have drawn back from him as a scorpion, and despised him as before ; but he had not such strength of cruelty or selfishness, and let her seem to lead him as she willed.

And gradually the estrangement between Madcap

and her husband grew, for she could not forgive his hardness to Hester, and refusal to herself, while the slight coldness she had lately shown him, though it pierced the man's heart to its core, aroused his pride, so that it seemed easier to him to let her go than entreat her to remain beside him.

Each day he grew less and less a companion to Madcap, shrouding himself from all communication with his fellows, and often speaking and moving like a man in a dream, though at times he would be inspired with those violent spirits that by some are looked upon as the forerunner of death or disaster.

A curious observer would have noticed that Mr. Eyre constantly put Frank forward to perform those little acts of attention to which she was accustomed from himself, and Madcap's pride being touched, she took them willingly, and grew into the habit of looking to Frank on every occasion, and that, too, without any apparent disrespect towards her husband.

Her health was so sound, and her spirits so good, that often Mr. Eyre would forget her situation, nor feel that it called for any special tenderness from himself. Indeed, it was his settled aim at this time to repress each impulse towards her as it arose, so that after a time the habit of coldness seemed fixed; and a stranger, seeing the two together, might have supposed this proud, reserved man to be bitterly repenting the folly that had joined him to the joyous, girlish creature that he called wife. Perhaps Dody was the

only one who got a peep into her real heart at that time, or saw the tears that never fell save when her arms were round him. Perhaps, too, he guessed the cause of them, for one day, as he kissed her eyes dry, he exclaimed triumphantly—

'Daddy makes you cry—*I* make you well!'

Mr. Eyre would have Frank at his house at all hours, and the children must go to the Towers and fetch him if a day passed without his appearance, and often from his window Mr. Eyre would look out at these two young people, and the happy children, feeling himself as far away from all four as though he inhabited another world; but no twinge of healthy jealousy or pain moved him—a profound apathy held him in its grip. If formerly he had struggled against fate, now he seemed passively to resign himself to it; or rather, having decided on his course, he permitted himself to drift with the current, feeling no strivings of love, sorrow, hate, revenge; and even looking on Hester one day, when she crossed his path in the village, with an indifference that was not assumed.

If sometimes Madcap's careless glance, as it flitted past him, caught something of the change in his face, it moved her more with the irritation of youth against a self-centred, preoccupied man, than with the pity that had formerly thrilled her at any sign of anxiety in him, and the look, the word, which might have brought their hearts in unison, remained unspoken.

Perhaps if he could have told a fairy tale as Frank

did, with a curly head resting on each shoulder, or stooped to the exquisite fooling that can alone make men and women the companions of children, Madcap might have forgiven his coldness towards herself; but what was the young fellow's charm, his strength to Madcap, showed in the light of a weakness to Mr. Eyre.

And meanwhile the season stole onward, the corn lay in golden seas beneath the August sun, and the farmers wiped the sweat from their brows, and praised God for the weather. The storm-cock had not been heard for a month; the harsh cry of the swift sounded like music in the ears of those who desired but fine weather for a few days longer to gather in that which had taken so long to grow; the slaughter of the innocents, otherwise that of the drones by the bees, was over; and the wild cherries had ripened, and been eaten by unpampered village lips.

The fools'-parsley had emerged to look for his brethren above ground, and gone home again, not having learned much that was new; the asphodel had come again, asking the old question that so few of us can answer; and the flying ants been received with hatred, and seen to depart with joy. In that ripe, still splendour of field, and wood, and sky there was a gorgeous solemnity, a superb hush, as though, having run its utmost limit of perfection, the hand of the dial now struck the hour in one grand perfected note, then turned to retrace its steps, a little of the

wealth and life lessening with every step, and growing greyer and colder as it retreated.

CHAPTER X.

'Our life is but a pilgrimage of blasts;
And every blast brings forth a fear,
And every fear a death.'

THE first of September had arrived, but neither at the Towers nor the Red Hall was any party assembled, though, at Mr. Eyre's urgent request, Frank departed for a few days to a neighbouring house, where he bewitched the women, and enraged the men, by the simplicity with which he wore his honours as a modern Lovelace.

The women's innuendoes, and the men's open congratulations on his success, sent Frank home with such a sick feeling of the powerlessness of calumny, that for three days after his return he could not bring himself to approach the Red Hall.

But Mr. Eyre, who had watched his wife narrowly, thinking that she drooped in Frank's absence, sent him a private word begging him to come over next day, and, himself unobserved, was witness to the scene between them when they met.

Madcap was sitting in her favourite nook of the garden with a scrap of needlework in her hand, and a nursery book on her knee, out of which she was teaching the children to spell, when, looking up, she saw

Frank coming, and started up all rosy with delight. And first Doune threw down his book, and rushing to the young fellow, got hold of his hand and shook it man-fashion ; then Dody got his other, and must kiss his 'dear beautiful Frank,' and so reach his shoulder; then Madcap advanced and placed her little hand and thimble in his unoccupied one, so that unconsciously they made one of those most beautiful pictures that the gazer may be permitted to think so much the finer because it is never painted. Mr. Eyre looked on contented. This was as it should be. When feeling the vital forces decaying within him, he thought he had resigned himself willingly to death, seeing happiness for Madcap with Frank in the future.

In that curious sense of dual existence that had long possessed him, he seemed at that moment to be looking on at something that had been, or was about to be, no sense of outrage to himself piercing the insensibility that enwrapped him ; but Frank, catching sight of that face beyond, and as though a glance had power to dissolve the group, Madcap and the boys were left behind, and the two men brought face to face.

'All well, Frank ?' said Mr. Eyre, brought back to realities by the grip of the young fellow's hand.

'All well,' said Frank, with a sigh. 'The Duke's whitewashing has taken effect, and I am accepted by the county. But what does it matter ?' he added quickly. 'Madcap is out of spirits, and you are looking ill.'

'I've not slept since yesterday,' said Mr. Eyre. 'We will go out, and you shall take us through your woods;' and he stepped through the open window with Frank beside him. He noted, if he did not inquire into, the blush with which Madcap met them; but as they took their way to the Towers, a curious sense of unreality possessed him, and an odd idea occurred to his mind. He thought that he was dead, and that these two, whose happy voices and laughter sounded in his ears like echoes from a great distance, were living, and he, all unseen, a spirit who kept pace beside them, and of whose presence they were ignorant, as his memory by them was forgotten. He seemed to walk on air, his head light as his shadow cast before him, down a long long arcade that had no ending, and in which he was doomed to walk with these two who knew him not, for ever, though with it all he had a vague sense that he was asleep, and dreaming over again something that had happened to him yesterday, or the day before.

Air, sky, and earth were lulled to an exquisite calm; the very birds, cheated into the belief that spring had come again, poured out their songs as sweetly as in that brief time of love and happiness. It was the hour of the year's repose, the quiet folding of its hands as it sank peacefully to sleep, its preparations over, its fruits garnered in, like one of those saintly lives whose evening is even more satisfying than its vigorous, striving youth.

Half-way down the avenue Madcap paused suddenly as the regular blow of the woodman's axe sounded in the distance.

'Hark!' she cried. 'You are cutting down these trees!' and she turned to Frank with eyes of reproach.

'It is only the woodpecker,' he said. 'No,' he added in a lower tone, 'not one of these lofty glorious heads ever fell at my bidding—never shall as long as I live. There is something appalling, even blasphemous to me, in the sight of one of these monarchs, that have weathered so many storms, crashing to earth at the bidding of man, not God. To be rent by a thunderbolt is grand, but to be hewn down by the axe a degradation.'

'It is like a human life,' said Madcap, looking wistfully up at the interlaced boughs overhead. 'How much better to be struck down by one blow—the short sudden pang quickly over, bearable because of the happiness and vigour lasting to the end, than to die gradually . . . . first one's illusions, then hopes, then perhaps love, then, by-and-by youth, and one's soul and heart dying last of all. . . .'

Frank's eyes sank; he supposed her to be thinking of Hester, but Mr. Eyre looked up, while Dody, struck by the word *die,* exclaimed:

'*Don't* die, mummy; *don't* die,' and clung with desperate fondness to her hand, while Doune announced his intention of killing anyone who hurt her, with his new pocket-knife.

'You have overtired yourself,' exclaimed Frank, seeing how white she had suddenly gone; and as he spoke, she staggered slightly, and involuntarily putting out her hand, seized that of Mr. Eyre.

It was like a stray clasp recalling a wandering soul to earth. He took the hand, and drew it under his arm, looking down at her with a glance that made her steps still more uncertain as they traversed the remainder of the avenue.

Job saw them approaching, and indulged in a pantomime that expressed intense hatred of something or somebody, though when they had entered the house, he was assiduous in bringing wine, and waiting upon Mrs. Eyre, who had long ago won his heart.

When she was settled in an easy-chair by the library window, Frank took the children away, looking back once as he went to where she sat, as in bygone years he had so often pictured her sitting as his wife; though this was a paler Madcap than the one he had hoped to win.

'It is a place to dream in,' she said, almost timidly, when she found herself alone with Mr. Eyre, her eyes turning from the avenue to glance round the room in which she sat, lofty and beautiful with its ceiling and walls of oak, blackened with age, and decorated with arms and trophies of the chase. But Mr. Eyre noted that a blood-red stain was thrown across her bosom from the stained glass of the upper window, in which the colours glowed like a tulip-bed through which the sun is shining.

'And to be happy in as well,' said Mr. Eyre. 'And this was to have been your home, Madcap. How much more suited to your youth and brightness than the Red Hall and its old master.'

'Are you sorry that I am not here?' she said, looking up, her lips quivering. 'You should have thought of that before. I am afraid—even to oblige you and the Duchess—it is too late now.'

'I was thinking of Frank,' said Mr. Eyre, not yet free of his character of on-looker.

'And of course Frank is the first consideration,' said Madcap gravely, with a suspicion of mischief playing round her mouth.

Mr. Eyre turned quickly, and looked at her. As their eyes met, something in hers turned the stone in his breast to a living thing that leaped towards her, and brought him to her side.

'Madcap,' he said, and the old masterful ring had come back to his voice, the old fire to his eyes, 'you would rather be up at the Red Hall than here!'

A deep blush gathered on Madcap's face as she glanced up at the worn and weary face that had for a moment regained all its charm, then, half turning away, gave him one of those sudden sweet looks that none but a good woman knows how to give, and then only to the man whom she purely and deeply loves.

'And could you think of my loving anyone . . . . or of anyone but my husband loving me?' she said in a whisper. 'And *did* you admire the Duchess?' she added anxiously.

'Not I; but you admired Frank.'

'No; I loved him. I do love him,' she added gravely. 'You see, he is so fond of the children, and, then,' here her dimples looked out, 'lately we have been sacrificing each other for Frank; and why not sacrifice *ourselves* while we are about it?'

'Why not?' said Mr. Eyre. 'At any rate, I'll *kiss* you for your own sake, and I won't give you up to him. I'll live to plague you—to make you miserable, even, some day, if necessary—but I won't die.' He drew her closer, but she eluded his grasp.

'Husband,' she said in a whisper, 'did you ever—ever kiss her?'

'And kiss you after?' he said with a frown.

'Oh, you have not kissed me for a long time,' said Madcap; 'we have only made pecks at each other's faces, and I thought perhaps it was because——'

'I take my kisses elsewhere,' said Mr. Eyre grimly; 'and where were yours?'

'Oh, the children got them.'

'They will only get their own share after to-day,' said Mr. Eyre drily.

'But did you?' said Madcap, still keeping her lips out of reach.

'As often as you kissed Frank; not one more or less.'

'But he *did* kiss my hand,' said Madcap, looking down with grave dissatisfaction at that guilty member.

'And the Duchess—but, no; we are even Madcap, if you never kissed Frank's hand, and if I never kissed hers.'

'Dody wants to say his pairs,' said Dody's awe-struck voice in the doorway; 'and mummy's teaching him what to say.'

CHAPTER XI.

> 'Twas he
> Gave heat unto the injury which returned,
> Like a petard ill-lighted into the bosom
> Of him gave fire t'it.'

THERE followed on that visit to the Towers a period of the most vivid happiness that Mr. Eyre had ever known, for his fears being lulled to sleep by Frank's assurance that Hester was more determined to avoid an interview with Madcap than the latter was to obtain it, and also a keen sense of having recovered something that he had almost lost, gave a charm, a zest to the merest trifle of every-day existence in Madcap's company; so that unconsciously to himself, he was going through the phase that she had done after Frank had told her that he was the sinner, not Mr. Eyre.

It was one of those ideal autumns that renew the senses with all the freshness, without the languor, of spring, and late October itself brought no shroud of fog, but only an added charm and brilliancy of atmosphere that kept Madcap and the children out and about all day, often with Mr. Eyre, though oftener still with Frank.

And Frank, in a fashion, was happy too; for hard as he found it to be for ever in Madcap's company, and not betray himself, he had found even a few days' absence from her harder still; and each day was being brought into finer discipline, by the unconsciously selfish happiness of the two persons who dearly loved him.

And no echo of the world's scandal, or its clamour, came to disturb that golden season to husband and wife; if none of the usual invitations reached them, the state of Madcap's health accounted for the omission, and Mr. Eyre, too happy in his home to wish to leave it, even neglected those duties as magistrate for which he had long had a secret disinclination. Job alone felt a bitter dissatisfaction at the position of affairs, the more so, as his 'dear little Master Frank' never permitted him in any way to allude to the conversation that he had overheard on the occasion of Mr. Eyre's visit.

'But murder will out,' the old man would mutter to himself; 'we've not seen the end of it yet, and though you may snatch an Eyre out of the devil's mouth once, Nick's safe to get him in the long run.'

About this time Josephine would, with locked doors at night, gloat over certain trinkets and gewgaws that had lately come into her possession, though sometimes a shuddering thought of the coin in which they were to be paid for, would make her hide them even from her own eyes.

Between the two women was no spoken contract,

but Josephine knew how gradually, and in such a way as to disarm suspicion, Hester was making her arrangements to leave the village; 'to join her own people,' she said, with a brightness on her face that seemed to tell of the welcome with which they would receive her.

The village opinion had veered round towards her during the six months she had dwelt among them; her utter indifference to the effect her beauty produced upon the men, her acquaintance with Frank limited to a few words spoken on both sides when by chance they met, her passionate devotion to Mr. Eyre's child, that by some strange hallucination (or so the villagers thought) she believed to resemble her drowned baby, had earned the respect of more than one wife and mother, though they wondered greatly that she should willingly leave the boy in whose very life she seemed bound up.

There were many prayers put up for Madcap in the village at this time, the chief being that a woman-child might be born to her, and so win Mr. Eyre, for the first time, to love a child of his own for the sake of its resemblance to its mother.

'I think if I'd got a new-born baby to lie in my arms,' said Hester one day in late October, when the gossips were wondering what Yule-tide would bring to the Red Hall, 'I could bear to let one of the other ones go. Couldn't you?' she added suddenly to Bet of the Mill.

'I don't know,' said Betty ruminatingly; 'you see, we grumble when they are coming, and there's the pain; but there ain't a true woman that hates the child for *that*—and somehow, whether it's Tommy or Polly, or Mat or Bill, they make their way to our hearts, and we can't abide to lose 'em, even if the Burial Club do pay up handsome, and we've got the satisfaction of knowing they're comfortabler up top as cherubims, where, having no stomachs, they can't feel hungry-like, as they do more or less below. And what with washing days, and a husband getting tight most Saturday nights,' she added reflectively, 'the chil'en gets a poor time of it; but there, you've got the mother's heart, and you understand,' she added, clutching Hester's unringed hand with her own weather-beaten honest one.

Early in November there was circulated one day in the village a report of Mrs. Eyre's sudden and premature illness. Hester was one of the first to hear it, and scarcely waiting to cloak herself, made her way to the Red Hall, and unobserved (as she thought) reached the nursery by the door that led from it to the garden. It was about three o'clock, and in the clear autumnal air the house wore an unwonted look of cheerfulness and peace, so that on looking at it one noticed less the frown thrown from the rock behind it, than the red banners flung by the sun on its many windows, and so giving warmth to the otherwise cold colouring of the *façade*.

'Is she dead?' thought Hester, as she turned the handle and went in, struck by the quiet that reigned in the nurseries. As she went forward, trembling and afraid, she heard a step behind her, and turning, came face to face with Mr. Eyre, who had seen her enter, and followed.

She neither moved nor spoke, but stood a petrified image of detected guilt, feeling that what she had perilled her soul, and her vow to Madcap to win, had escaped her.

'What is your errand here?' he said, his old suspicions returning in full force as he marked each sign of guilty terror written on her face; 'you were looking for my wife?' he said quietly.

A sudden gleam shot across her features—he had suggested to her an idea, and she boldly seized upon it as a bulwark behind which to shelter her real intention.

'Why not?' she said sullenly. 'She was kind to me. I have a mind to see her—she wants to see *me*. Times and times I have got out of her way; but now I would like to have a word with her before it is too late; for she is ill, they say, and she might be beyond my reach to-morrow. She isn't dead?' she added, struck by the curious change that had passed over Mr. Eyre's face.

'Dead!' he repeated, the hatred of his glance, the scorn of his voice, keen as the stab of a knife to her heart; 'and you living? But you tempt fate,' he

added abruptly. 'I gave you your warning once before; I give it you now again. Make one more effort to see her, and the consequences be on your own head.'

'You told me that before,' she said slowly, 'and I might have listened to you then. I'd only got a taste of happiness; and a soul that's faint with starving 'll sometimes lay the bit of food down, feeling that she's got beyond it, and it's easier to die than to worry on. But when you've got to love your life, and morning, noon, and night your heart cries out to be fed, it isn't in human nature to go away to oblige somebody who's been cruel to you from the beginning. . . .'

Warped and stultified as was the woman's instinct of right, even now it yet moved her towards the father of her dead child. She could have forgiven him, she thought, if it had lived in his image, representing the good he might have brought to her life, and not the evil; but implacable and stern, Mr. Eyre stood, the judge, not the sharer in the sin, and the moment of relenting scorched up in her breast as suddenly as it had been born.

'You can be reached through her,' she said, with one of those impulses of reckless untruth that sometimes will sweep a good as well as a bad woman away; 'if she came in here now, this minute, I'd tell her before your eyes. It would not take very long to say, "Your husband is the father of my dead child. Lord Lovel told you a lie!" '

She came close to him, possessed by a rage that

tempted violence; but Mr. Eyre returned her glance with a calmness that still further maddened her.

'Perhaps you'll keep us apart after all,' she said, 'but deeds can speak as well as words; and when you see her heart wrung, and her cheek white with misery, perhaps you will understand a little of what I felt when I lost my baby. . . . .'

She ceased abruptly, terrified lest she should have given him a clue; but as she moved a step away, her foot struck against something that lay on the ground.

Her lips quivered, her eyes softened as she stooped and lifted the little shoe and put it to her lips, crying out below her breath, 'Oh, my little love! my little angel! I am good when you are in my arms . . . . and I don't hate her then . . . . I'm not jealous of her then. . . .'

If a woman had been by, she must have understood what was in this poor wretch's heart; but Mr. Eyre saw nothing in the outburst but one frenzied woman's jealousy of another, salved over in her own eyes by a sentimental fondness for a child.

'Go!' he said, and held the door open.

'Shall I?' she said, pushing back the masses of black hair from her wild beautiful eyes. 'Ay, but I'll come back. You shan't turn me from my purpose; I'll carry it out to the end.'

'Unless you die first,' he said.

'Die!' she repeated; 'and may not *she* die, as well as other people? Have you ever thought of that—

how some day you may lose her, and so get your punishment at last? Even now she is ill——'

'Who said so?' cried Mr. Eyre, starting.

'So that touches you,' she said bitterly; 'but when your child suffers—is not that his voice?' she added abruptly, and went to the window and looked out.

Madcap was passing with the children, her straw bonnet pushed back, her face glowing with health and happy smiles as the boys ran beside her.

A look of bitter jealousy clouded Hester's face as she gazed; perhaps she had never before been so struck by the difference in their two lots than at that moment; and Mr. Eyre, catching that look, was to be excused if afterwards it came back to him with a significance at once fatal and sinister.

As the three disappeared, Hester moved to the door, but paused on the threshold and looked at Mr. Eyre.

'I'll come back,' she said. 'You may think to save her from me, but you won't; perhaps after all there won't be a word spoken between us; but I am going to reach her heart for all that—and if she dies, mind it's not I that killed her, but you—*your* sin and *your* punishment.' Then, wrapping herself more closely in her cloak, hurried down the steps, and was gone!

CHAPTER XII.

'For I have dreamed a dreary dream.
Beyond the Isle of Skye
I saw a dead man win a fight,
But I think that man was I.'

HALF-AN-HOUR before dinner Mr. Eyre went to his wife's room, and found her sitting at her toilet-table, a row of open jewel-cases before her, that contained the diamonds she occasionally had brought out to make sure of their safety, and the whim seized him that she should wear them that evening.

'Frank is coming,' he said. 'Somehow to-night reminds me of that one when I came home to you from Paris, and dressed you all in white. Women like you should always wear white, just as there are others whom it would be unnatural to think of save in black. And that loose, soft robe you were going to put on is white—will you wear them?' he added, in a strange voice, as he lifted the stones from their satin bed, and held them above her head, she looking with pleasure at the dazzling glitter.

'You'll let the children come and see me,' she said; whereupon Mr. Eyre bade the woman bring the boys, and meanwhile fastened her necklace and bracelets himself, and secured the lace at her neck with three brilliant stars.

Dody came in his night-gown. He had been interrupted in his prayers, and now from Josephine's arms clasped his little hands and said, in an awe-struck

voice, 'Mummy's going to Heaven!' while Doune, half in fear, fingered her bracelets, exclaiming that they were made of fire, seemingly more perplexed than delighted with her unwonted adornment.

Perhaps that luxuriance of womanly beauty that had come to Madcap of late struck Mr. Eyre as he gazed at the three; perhaps he then, for the first and last time in his life, realised how beautiful her motherhood was, as she sat with Dody's dark, flushed face against the whiteness of her throat, while Doune, curious to discover how that necklace of sparks had got fastened round her neck, peeped over her shoulder, completing the group.

In the background Josephine looked with greedy, sparkling eyes at the jewels in which her mistress was decked, while the maid's stolid eyes expressed more amazement at than covetousness of the baubles.

Mr. Eyre was struck by Josephine's look, and as he lifted Dody out of his mother's arms, and placed him in those of the woman, he said to himself that in future he must study her more carefully than he had hitherto done. Dody knew better than to resist, but his lips quivered, and a look of despair came into the little face.

'Seep wiz mummy!' he said imploringly, as Josephine carried him away, the contrast of his warm nest in his mother's arms and the loneliness of his little cold cot piercing him with a sense of loss and misery as he went.

But sooner than Dody dreamed of was he to be safe with his mother—to sleep, ay, and to awake with her, the threads of their lives inwoven to all eternity.

'Don't look so sad,' said Mr. Eyre, as they went downstairs together. 'In five minutes Dody will be safe again in your arms—in dreamland.'

'We have been holding a dress rehearsal,' he added, as they entered the drawing-room, and Frank rose to meet them.

Mr. Eyre led Madcap to her own chair, brought a footstool, arranged a screen to guard her from draughts; but Frank said nothing. He was looking at Madcap, and wondering at her beauty, till catching that fixed look, she laughed, and said he was as unappreciative of her diamonds as the children had been.

'A glowworm will outshine them,' said Mr. Eyre. 'I saw three to-night, tempted out in the belief that spring had come again, I suppose.'

'That is very unusual,' said Frank. 'Where did you see them?'

'In Synge Lane,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly, and both Frank and Madcap looked up suddenly; but Mr. Eyre's eyes were inscrutable, and told nothing.

Yet he seemed to be labouring under strong nervous excitement, and presently something occurred to cause Frank the keenest anxiety. They were crossing the hall to the dining-room, when Mr. Eyre suddenly stopped, his dilated eyes apparently fixed on something in the distance.

'Look!' he exclaimed. 'Did you see that under the clock?'

They looked, but there was nothing. Frank knew the legend, but Madcap did not, how when death or misfortune of any kind threatened the Eyres, the uncouth figure of a dwarf appeared for a few seconds to one of the family beneath the old clock on the stairs.

But in a moment Mr. Eyre had recovered himself, and led Madcap into the beautifully-lit room.

'See,' he said, 'the table is dressed with as much care as you.' And to her surprise, she saw a quantity of beautiful hothouse flowers heaped in the centre of the table, and a small choice bouquet laid beside each napkin.

'Where could the gardener have got them?' exclaimed Madcap. 'He had not one in the place this morning, and he will never beg any from the surrounding houses.'

'Oh, I got them,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly; 'that honest fool had nothing to do with it. Try that wine, Frank; it has been in the cellar over a hundred years. I bade them bring it out to-night in your honour.'

Frank just tasted the wine, but he was haunted by an uneasiness that Mr. Eyre's every look and word tended to confirm.

He knew how danger roused and excited this remarkable man, stimulating his intellectual powers to extraordinary brilliancy; and while Madcap laughed in delight at her husband's spirits, Frank felt

more and more convinced that something fresh had occurred with regard to Hester.

'No, you are wrong,' said Mr. Eyre, suddenly turning his keen eyes upon the young fellow. 'Glow-worms, Frank, have been known to walk in at an open window, attracted by the light; and moths, too, are often attracted to their own destruction; but they do not kill, they are usually killed.'

Madcap looked from one to the other perplexed.

'It is nothing,' said Mr. Eyre, smiling; 'it is an old jest, Madcap, yet all jests must have an end. Your health; and yours, Frank. May next year find you both as handsome and as happy as you are now.'

'And you,' cried Madcap. 'What of you?'

'Nothing,' he said, removing a glass that she was lifting to her lips. 'You know, Madcap, I always had a horror of toasts or weddings, as well as of—black-beetles,' he added, laughing.

He kept his hand upon hers, talking nonsense, until she had forgotten her intention; then, Frank declining to take any more wine, they went back to the drawing-room, where a cheerful wood-fire burned, and seemed to invite their company.

They drew around it, Madcap between them; and never had an hour passed to her more happily than with these two beside her, whose love made such an atmosphere of rest and content.

At half-past ten Mr. Eyre rose. 'I must leave you, Madcap,' he said, 'but not for long. Don't let Frank

go until I come back. I have work that must be done to-night, and then—ay—then——'

'Then we will be happier than we ever were before,' cried Madcap; 'will we not, Frank?'

'You will be,' said Mr. Eyre, with a scarcely perceptible accent on the 'you.' 'And I shall be happy —when—when——'

He did not complete the sentence, but smiled, then went into the library. They heard the key turn in the lock as the door closed.

'There are but a few pages to add to his work,' said Madcap, whose face had shadowed over at his departure; 'it will be his greatest,' she added with womanly pride, then turned to the piano; but recollecting that Mr. Eyre must not be disturbed, closed it, and approached the window.

'There will be a moon to-night,' she said, lifting the curtain, and looking through the glass left unshuttered each evening until she had retired to rest.

Frank came to her side, and together they looked out at the blue-black dome pierced with a million darts of fire, tipped with wild, blue, spirit-like brightness—at ruddy Mars and brilliant Sirius, already beginning to pale before the crescent just rising out of her silver-lined clouds.

'I never look at the stars,' she said, 'without thinking of that Vendean peasant who, on being told that the church steeples were to be demolished, and so the last traces of their religious belief swept away,

said, 'You may do that, but you cannot abolish our stars, and we see them from a much greater distance.'

Frank thought she looked a part of the starlit sky itself, something too of its solemn beauty seemed to have touched her, as she went on wistfully:

'How it quiets one to look at them; how all one's little angry, jealous thoughts drop away . . . . one sees the temptation, not the fall—the struggle after right, not the failure; one scorns nothing, and no one . . . . Frank,' and she turned to the young fellow, 'I seem to see things so differently now. Open the window a little way, and let me see the sky without the glass between. I think I used to look at many things as through glass, Frank; not face to face, as I look at them now . . . . perhaps it is because I am so happy . . . . sometimes I think no one could be as happy as I am, without being punished for it . . . . there was only one little cloud to make me less perfectly content, but it's gone now . . . . I'll tell you to-morrow, but I must tell *him* first.'

He thought instantly of Hester, and supposed that some interview had taken place between the two women, which becoming known to Mr. Eyre, had thrown him into a state of disorder that once before had culminated in an impulse of murder; but he said no word, only she seemed dearer to him then in her pathetic situation, and by her noble-mindedness, than she had ever been to him in her thoughtless youth. . . .

'Somehow,' she went on gently, 'things are so clear to me to-night—as though I had got out into a purer air, and it was easy to see things as they really are. I know now that I need not have been miserable about the Duchess, and I was wicked towards you. But that's all over now . . . . only you'll remember some day that I told you so. And you've made me very happy, Frank—and Dody loves you.'

'God bless you, Madcap!' he said, and kissed her hand, feeling that she had given him the crown, the reward of his long faithfulness to her. But some one outside, who did not hear the words spoken, leaned forward and looked after the young pair as they moved from the window back into the room.

She tried one of the two doors that communicated with the library. It was locked, and though she called to him, Mr. Eyre did not reply.

'I am tired,' she said to Frank, 'and will leave you now. You will wait a little while for him?'

Frank said that he would; and having bid each other 'Good-night,' she turned at the foot of the stairs to look back and smile.

So he saw her for the last time in life . . . . so for sixteen long years he remembered her . . . . the sweet little tyrant of his youth, the early love of his manhood—Madcap . . . . Madcap . . . .

CHAPTER XIII.

'Be pitiful, O God!'

FRANK, left alone, sat down by Madcap's little table, all thought of Mr. Eyre gone in the delight that her words had given him.

'You have made me very happy,' she had said, and more than that he could not have done, even to giving her up his life, and to-night it seemed to him a very little thing that he had taken upon himself, and the reward out of all proportion to the sacrifice.

His thoughts went back to that day in the copse, when she had known her one short, sharp, bitter space of misery—misery so quickly turned to joy as to be over almost before she had tasted it; and if afterwards she had sorrowed for Hester's sake, and his sin, that sorrow had touched no vital part of her life, and she was Madcap still, in her brightness, innocence and youth, as she should always be in heart so long as he lived to guard her. And this presentiment, though scarcely of evil, that seemed to possess her to-night, meant nothing; it was only a passing mood, and to-morrow she would be as bright as she had been that morning. And then his thoughts travelled back over the day that had begun happily by his meeting her with the boys in the village, and he had persuaded her to go with him to see a pretty sight that he had chanced upon an hour before.

It was no less than a group of three young chest-

nuts that had burst out in a complete new suit of leaves and flowers, affording a marked contrast to the russet-brown matrons standing by, who had an air of by no means approving of such out-of-season frivolity.

They had stood silent before the curious and beautiful sight; then Madcap, looking up with something very sweet and solemn in her face, had said to him, 'Frank, don't these trees make you think of a human life in more ways than one? of a life that has been happy, and all at once trouble came to it, and stripped it of everything—just as the chaffers came in spring and destroyed the leaves of these trees—leaving them bare when those around were beautiful and happy; but now, in autumn, just when all the others are sober and dull, these have their youth renewed, just as that life might be even more beautiful and happy in its autumn than its spring.'

'But there are some lives, as there are certain trees, that cannot be so renewed,' Frank had said sadly; 'once stripped of happiness, the heart never stirs in them again, and after all these seem to me the grandest trees, the noblest hearts.'

'No!' Madcap had cried; 'that which has once loved for love's sake, been happy for another's sake, may have thought it has lost all, but yet carries in itself the power to produce as beautiful fruit as any that have gone before, and a second youth is possible as to that tree which has so boldly reversed the edict of fate.'

But Frank had shaken his head ; there could be no second Madcap to him in the world.

And then they had stood still to watch the children go down the glade, dancing over the yellow leaves with feet as light as the hearts that winged them, and no instinct told the mother that this was the last time the little brothers would pass that way—the last time her eyes would follow them.

He wished now that he had gone all the way home with her, and so have averted that meeting which he feared had taken place, and that accounted for the excitation of mood Mr. Eyre had displayed that night. To Frank it was a lamentable failing in that strong mind, the incessant fear of what Hester might say or do ; but he forgot that Mr. Eyre had only seen her in those fiercer moods when anger had swayed her, or when that mad, reckless determination to move him, that will often make a woman wilfully degrade herself in a man's eyes, had carried her beyond both truth and honour. And to-night all his sleeping dread of that catastrophe to which he had feared Mr. Eyre's violence of hatred might impel him, was once more awakened. This lethargy that Mr. Eyre had thought to mean decay, Frank knew to be natural as the snow-wreath that covers the earth while, beneath it, busy life is at work, silently preparing its forces against the coming struggle ; for even inanimate creation, as in our insolence we term it, does not achieve existence at a leap ; and while brain and

heart rested sluggishly, Mr. Eyre's strength was secretly renewing itself, whether for good or evil. The Necessarian, in effect, says, 'Given the whole of the antecedents, the action can be predicted.' The Fatalist adds, that the man himself has nothing to do with the antecedents. Democritus teaches that chance is at the bottom of all things, and so reduces life—all things—to very barren issues; not strength, truth, courage, nor ability, winning the race, but *chance*. And Frank wondered if this same chance had taken Mr. Eyre to Synge Lane that night; but the thought was too horrible to be pursued; and Frank, pacing the room restlessly, longed for the library door to open, and his host come out to reassure him.

But Mr. Eyre, sunk deep in slumber, with the pen in his hand, could not have awakened if he would, so powerfully in a species of nightmare was he held; and when Frank, after restlessly waiting another half-hour, tried the door, and found it still locked, he resolved to wait no longer, for he had an errand to perform that night, and would feel no peace till it was accomplished. Half-past eleven struck as he closed the hall-door behind him, and at the same moment saw a black shadow flit across the courtyard, and disappear at the foot of the stone steps that led to the nursery.

'Hester!' he exclaimed aloud, with a sensation of intense relief that surprised himself; and as he passed below Madcap's window he paused and looked up at the light in it, and blessed her, and thanked God as

for one who has just been delivered from peril. A faint light issued from the room in which Mr. Eyre sat, and between the blind and the window-frame Frank caught a glimpse of him sound asleep at his table, his head sunk on the outstretched arms, a pen still grasped by his fingers.

In turning away, Frank struck his foot against a ladder placed against the wall; but of this he thought nothing, and in a few moments had mounted the stone steps, and found, as he expected, the outer door ajar. He entered, but not so quickly but that warning was given of his approach. As he gently pushed the nursery door open, a woman stole behind the half-open door of a linen-press, and stood there trembling, believing the new-comer to be Mr. Eyre.

Dody lay tossing on the bed, and Frank's heart contracted with a bitter pang as he looked down on his darling, who in dreamland clutched fast the pillow that represented to him his 'mummy.' Frank had been able to avert one sorrow from Madcap, but he knew that he could not avert this one; nothing short of a miracle would ever rear Dody to manhood now. The fatal cold caught on the spring morning when he had stolen out to gather that birthday flower, had taken fast hold upon him, and the beautiful little body in which the lamp of health appeared to burn so brilliantly, was already fevered and weakened by hidden mischief.

An inner door opened, and Josephine entered, starting back in genuine amazement at sight of Frank.

'Mrs. Clarke is here,' he said, approaching her. 'I saw her enter,' he added, as Josephine held up her hands and eyes in contradiction, and called upon heaven and earth to witness that there was not a soul there save the children and their two selves.

'And the door that I found open,' he said, 'how is that?'

The woman gave him an inscrutable look from under her long lashes—how many nights had she not thus left it on the latch?—then, as he still looked at her, she shrugged her shoulders.

'The diamonds dazzled me,' she said; 'it was in thinking of them that I forgot the door. Ah! *mon Dieu!*' and she clasped her hands, 'a man might die, commit a murder for a necklace like that'—perhaps it was of such a keepsake Mr. Digges had been thinking, when he had promised her—poor stupid fool that he was—anything if she would be his wife!

Frank smiled at the thought of the brilliant Frenchwoman as plain Mrs. Digges, but the thought did not cross his mind, as it would inevitably have done Mr. Eyre's, how in this stolid, stupid man's passion for the unprincipled woman lay the elements of a crime. He was thinking of Hester, and as certain that she was in the house, as that Josephine was ignorant of her presence.

He advanced to the inner room, followed by the nurse, and as they disappeared, a figure stole from its hiding-place, and with one rapid, passionate kiss on Dody's brow, passed out and down the stone steps.

CHAPTER XIV.

'What ho! Murder!'

THE night, its stillness, its peace, was suddenly rent in twain by a shriek so savage, so awful, that it drove the blood curdling round the hearts of those who heard, and for one helpless moment rooted them to the ground on which they stood, while their flesh crept, awaiting it knew not what.

Frank recovered himself first, instinct causing him to connect that cry with Madcap, though the voice was not hers; and scarce knowing where he went, he ran like one mad out of the nursery and along the corridors, till he reached the opposite wing, where, attracted by the light shining through a half-open door, he pushed it wide, and stood trying to collect his senses, endeavouring to grasp the scene upon which he gazed.

In an arm-chair, drawn close to the window, sat Madcap, to all appearance dead, her white wrapper all disordered and stained with blood, while Mr. Eyre, standing beside her, held his handkerchief to her side, and on seeing Frank, made a gesture to him to approach.

He was still in evening dress, and no speck of blood was about him save on his hands, which were deeply dyed from the office he filled; but his voice was steady as usual when he asked Frank to ride at once to Marmiton, and fetch a doctor.

'Not one of these fools could saddle a horse,' he added, with a look of scorn towards the servants, who had hastened on Frank's heels, and now crowded together, sobbing, crying, stumbling, Josephine alone preserving her self-control.

It was she who was the first to observe that the window was open; she who cried out, after a hurried glance round, that the diamonds were gone; she who removed a little table from her mistress's side that held a handkerchief, a book, and a few trifles, bringing in its place a heavier one, upon which she placed the medicine chest that Mr. Eyre bade her bring from his dressing-room.

But, alas! alas! poor Madcap! The hand that did 'medicine thee to that sweet sleep' could easier lay thee thus, still and silent, than rouse thee to life again; and as though conscious of the helplessness of his efforts, her husband suddenly ceased them, and carried her towards the bed, upon which she sank like snow.

As Mr. Eyre laid her down, he looked up. 'Seize him!' he cried; and all eyes were turned to the window, through which a man's face peered—heavy, animal, fixed in a kind of fascination that held it motionless, when a dozen hands were stretched forth to grasp the man's shoulders, and prevent his escape.

'Poor wretch!' said Mr. Eyre contemptuously, as he recognised his gardener. 'Let him go.' But those who, in their zeal, had already rushed round to the

outside of the house, thought proper to secure him, so that he appeared to drop backwards from the window, and vanished in a yell of execration that made night hideous, and seemed an outrage on the quiet figure that lay as if asleep, each feature stilled to a peace that might not be rudely broken.

'Go!' said Mr. Eyre to the remaining men and women, and their habitual awe of him returned; they hurried on each other's steps, and he was left alone with Madcap. He laid his lips to that little cruel rift in her side, he kissed her clay-cold mouth, and swore aloud that he would never rest till he had found her murderer, and delivered that murderer up to justice; and then, kneeling beside her, that beloved head on his shoulder, he listened for the sound of horses' feet that would herald a message of life or death. When we are at death's door, or in sore extremity, the man who has made the healing of the body his life's study comes to us like an angel of light, and as God's representative we receive and honour him; but when he has carried us through the valley, we scarcely turn our heads to thank him, and he is forgotten till sharp necessity bids us again summon him to our aid.

To Mr. Eyre, the short stout man who at the end of three-quarters of an hour entered was endowed with supernatural powers, when after five minutes' patient application of certain remedies, Madcap's eyes opened and looked into his.

And without, Frank leaned against the lintel, cold

and sick, scarcely listening for any stir within, so sure was he that death was there; but as he so stood, something cold slipped itself into his hand, and looking down, he saw Dody in his nightgown beside him.

That terrible cry had awakened him as well as the rest of the house, though Doune had slept soundly through it; and finding that Josephine was not in the room, Dody had got out of his warm bed and trotted with bare feet down the gallery, secure of finding a haven with his mother when he reached her room. But frightened by the confusion, and fearing he would be caught and carried back to bed, he had hidden behind a curtain, shivering with cold, until they had all gone, leaving the door shut.

He could not understand what they had been saying, but he knew that he should find mummy in there, only he had seen his father through the half-open door, and when the servants came out, he had not the courage to knock for admission.

As Frank took the little figure in his arms, trying to warm him and chafing those ice-cold feet, somehow he realised that no warmth could save him now—that death had struck Dody to the heart that night, even as it had struck his mother.

'Seep wiz mummy,' said Dody, as he clasped his cold arms round Frank's neck, and even as he said it, fell sound asleep in the young fellow's arms, so that when Mr. Eyre came out to summon attendance for

Madcap, the corridor was empty, Frank being then in the nursery.

The dining-room presented a strange scene. To one of the massive legs of the dining-table was firmly tied the man Digges, whose grimaces of fear as he looked round on his body-guard, furnished that element of the grotesque that is seldom absent in any real tragedy. His stupidity of countenance was in his favour; he seemed too utterly devoid of the courage to conceive, and the nerve to strike, that the deed entailed, though possibly a psychologist might have found in the man's brutishness all the elements of an accomplished murderer.

'Why couldn't you fall in love with one of your own sort,' the cook was saying, as the tears ran down her honest face, 'and not take up with a bit of folly like that, as sets joolery a sight before vartue? "When you can give me dimonds like missuses, I'll marry you," sez she, for I heard her; but oh, Lord! to think that you'll hang for that wicked speech as put murder in your heart!'

'I never touched the dimonds,' said the man sullenly; 'I only looked at 'em through the window' —then, seeing the change in the faces round, stuttered in his speech, still further deepening his fellow-servants' conviction of his guilt.

Few of the usual traits of vulgar curiosity and fear were visible among those present; intense grief for what had befallen an adored mistress cast out the

horror of the crime, and they thought less of the instrument than of that young life now hovering between life and death overhead.

They knew that she lived—that she would probably live until her child was born, and then—and then. . . . but if strong and earnest prayer put up by lips not used to pray might turn the balance by its urgency, then Madcap's feet would turn earthwards, and not towards those rushing waters that strike chill upon the feet of those that are fain to tarry on the shore.

As the night wore on, gradually the dining-room emptied of all save the prisoner and the grey-headed butler, who sat by the open door, straining his ears for the first sound that should reach him from his mistress's chamber. The women crept as close to it as they dared, more than one feeling indignant that Josephine should be within.

But in the awful emergency of the night, the French girl's wit and resource had shown themselves in an extraordinary degree; it was on her more than Mr. Eyre that the doctor relied at every turn; her head was cool, her hand steady as though nothing unusual had happened; even the room was restored to its usual order, and all traces of the cruel deed removed.

How did the night pass? Only when dawn came, it found Frank's broken heart healed, for he had fallen asleep with his arms round Dody, and in his dreams Madcap had come to meet him, and kissed his cheek as in the old boy and girl days together, and he had

told her with tears how he had dreamed that she was dead . . . . while she of whom he dreamed, and upon whose face the brightness of the golden city was already shining, with arms clasped round her husband's neck, was thanking God that he had brought her safely through the valley of the shadow of death.

CHAPTER XV.

'Sunrise was slanting o'er the city gates
Rosy and beautiful, and from the hills
The early risen poor were coming in. . . .'

DAY was breaking, not with foretaste of early winter, but vividly, like a page out of the missal of spring thrust in at hazard among the later chapters of the year. Madcap's heart swelled as she looked through the open window at the brightening sky beyond, then, as though the chilness of the morning had touched her, nestled closer to the shelter of Mr. Eyre's breast.

'One thinks of God first,' she said, as her hand stole up to her husband's neck, and rested there. 'But now—now you've got two Madcaps, instead of one, to play tricks with you, and be jealous of you, and *love* you!'

She laughed out joyously as she said it; but something in the sound of her own voice startled her, and she clung more closely to Mr. Eyre.

'How weak it sounds,' she said, with something like fear in her voice, 'and I feel so strong and well; even

that throbbing in my side has ceased . . . . husband,' she added, 'could one dream a thing, and wake up to find it *real?* Last night I thought that I fell asleep in my chair, and was half wakened by a sudden blow. I struggled to speak, to cry out, but could not; and when I opened my eyes you were bending over me, and there was a cruel pain *here* . . . . but after that I knew nothing till I woke with the cry of my little baby in my ears.'

'And who would harm you, sweetheart?' said Mr. Eyre, as he wound his arm closely about her side. 'It was a bad dream; you'll forget it presently.'

'It's forgotten now,' she said, in that voice of pure joy, with that light on her face that each new motherhood brings to some happy few . . . . as though the mother-heart were born over again each time there comes a new claim upon it.

But Mr. Eyre saw not that brightness—his face hidden in her hair, he was counting each breath she drew, knowing that each word she spoke, each weak pressure of the arm she gave him, carried her a step nearer to that unknown land to which, like a child ignorant of his destination, she was hurrying.

For Madcap was to be one of those who die 'not knowing,' who are gathered to their Father's bosom as children, the end of whose holiday is unlooked-for rest—who have been scared by no grisly tales on the way, and knowing no fear of their Father, greet Him as the friend of whom their mother's lips have taught them

. . . . recognising Him with passionate love as the reverent instincts of their youth recur. . . . .

Did Mr. Eyre add blackness to the sin that had slain her, when he resolved that she should set out with no more knowledge of her journey's end, than of the deed that had sped her on her way ?

He it was who, with iron will, had taken matters into his own hand from the moment he had discovered the crime—he who had administered chloroform to her in the very instant of her return to consciousness, so that she had scarcely felt one pang ere sinking into oblivion; and this he had done so ruthlessly, so entirely against the doctor's commands, that he had been warned by him that it would be murder if she died.

'I will abide by the issue,' Mr. Eyre had said, and the whole night through never left her side, till with the struggling dawn had come a new life, and Madcap had awakened to that ease of body that in cruelly hurt people so often precedes death.

If a pang seized his heart to think that somewhere she would awaken lonely, unprepared, not looking to the glory beyond, but backwards, stretching out her arms to those dear ones from whom she had set out with no word of parting, he put the thought by . . . . she had no sin to repent of—others could pray for her, and deep down in the man's stubborn heart struggled vague inarticulate cries . . . . it is by our human affections that we struggle up to those spiritual yearnings in which we recognise God.

'I'm so tired,' she said, 'but I don't want to fall asleep just yet . . . . it seems almost wicked to be so perfectly happy, as if one must be paid out for it by-and-by . . . . there was only one little thing, and that has come straight too, just in time . . . . but I'll tell you about that when I wake up . . . . and you won't be angry with her any more. And you'll tell Frank how well I am, and how happy . . . . somehow I had an instinct last night, that something was going to happen . . . . I'm afraid my little baby won't be very strong at first,' she added wistfully, 'but we'll take such care of her—you and I—and you always thought you could love something that was like me!

'How quiet you are,' she said, after a little pause, in which the ecstacy of spirit that possessed her rose higher; 'but you've had a long, trying night . . . . lay your head down on my shoulder, and we'll both go to sleep . . . . but I should like to see the children first. . . . .'

'They shall come presently,' he said, selfish in his love for her to the last, and grudging each priceless moment that was not given to himself.

'How fond they will be of her,' she said, a faint smile gathering on her beautiful wan lips; 'and when I get up I shall be able to run about, and jump and play as I used to do when you called me your Madcap, and I'll lead you many a dance yet'—the dimples showed in her white cheeks—'but you'll catch me up, as you always did, however much I might seem to get

ahead at first . . . . and Christmas is coming, the happiest Christmas I shall ever have known. . . .'

Would it be? O God! if he could only be sure of that . . . . if he could only know that, however miserable himself, somewhere she was happy . . . . his one earthly stake had been her happiness, and if he won that, at whatever cost to himself, he might surely be reckoned a man not worsted by fate, but victorious, since upon himself only fell the punishment of his sin.

'I think I could sleep now,' she said; and her voice was weaker than it had been a few minutes ago; 'but you'll call the children first . . . .' then lay with her eyes fixed on the door, listening for the little footsteps that soon were heard approaching.

Dody came dancing in half dressed, and ran to her, laughing; but Doune, who understood better, stood just within the threshold, his lip hanging, and his heart pierced by a trouble that he only vaguely understood.

Dody had climbed upon the bed, and thrown his arms round her neck, then crept under the coverlid, and drawing it up about his neck, tried to nestle to her side, and shut his eyes.

'Seep wiz mummy!' he said. 'Is 'oo *quite* comf'ble?' he added, wishing that his father would take his arm away, and so let him creep the closelier to her side.

She pressed the little curly head to her bosom, and kissed it; then beckoned to Doune, who came slowly, and looking at her with an earnestness that somehow

threw a new light on his character, and made her kiss him all the more tenderly for the thought that hitherto she had undervalued his affection.

When Josephine had placed a little white bundle in her arms, she whispered to Mr. Eyre, 'You'll kiss her first;' and this he did, but stooping his head in such fashion that she could not see his face, while on either side of her the little brothers gazed with awe on the mysterious atom that father had actually condescended to kiss.

'You've got a sister, my sweethearts,' she said, as Dody came close, and looked in the tiny face that already seemed to have something of her own look; 'and you'll love her, and be kind to her——'

But while Dody tried to take the baby out of Madcap's arms, Doune stood aloof, somehow convinced that it was the cause of his mother looking so sick . . . . and when her arms released their hold, and the two boys were led away, he was sure she must be very ill, or Dody's sobs would have awakened her.

She supposed that she must have fallen into a slumber, when after a space she awoke and found herself alone with Mr. Eyre, his arm still wound about her side, his head lying on her breast.

He asked if she were in any pain; but as the wife of Poëtus, who, with calm smile, and death-wounded heart, whispered to her lord, 'Sweet, it hurts not,' so Madcap, who knew no hurt, laughed and answered that she had never felt so well, or so supremely happy,

as now . . . . then, as a child who nestles itself closer to the bosom of its mother, too weary even to lift its lips for a good-night kiss, Madcap fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

'The corpse is calm below our knee,
The spirit bright above with Thee,
Between them worse than either, we
Without the rest and glory:
Be pitiful, O God!'

DODY and Doune had been kept close prisoners all the morning, and could not think why so many people kept coming and going, and why the villagers came to the door to sob and cry—Dody was sure they would disturb his mother, who was still asleep, they told him, and must not be wakened.

But in the servants' dinner hour he escaped into the garden, and there picked as big a nosegay of flowers as he could find. He was some time choosing a handful to his taste, and wondered at his liberty as he ran hither and thither, till he had got it to his mind. Then he crept upstairs, and sat down outside his mother's door, waiting till she should wake up and open it. He wished that he had not got such a dreadful pain in his chest—it made him cough, and he had been told to be very quiet; but presently he would see mummy, and she would take him in her arms, and she would kiss him, and then the pain would go quite away.

He waited patiently for awhile, then kneeled down; and putting his lips to the keyhole, said in a whisper:

'Mummy! mummy!' then, as he got no reply, laid the bunch of flowers down on the threshold, and applying his two little hands to the lock, contrived to turn it, picked up his flowers, and went in.

The blinds were down, the room was in twilight. All looked cold and strange . . . . that shrouded outline on the bed was strangest of all . . . . that was not mummy . . . . he would go downstairs and look for her.

As he ran out of the room, his face bright with the thought that he would so soon see her, he saw Frank approaching, and flew to meet him.

'Fowers for mummy!' he shouted, holding them up. 'Me picked them for her all my own self, but me *can't* find her;' adding earnestly, as he slipped his hands into Frank's, 'have you *seen* her anywhere?'

I don't know why the sight of a little happy child, running to his dead mother with flowers in his hand, calling aloud her name in full confidence of finding her, should pierce a young man's heart more deeply than if he had seen that child cry his heart out on her cold body . . . . but as Frank caught Dody up in his arms, the strain upon heart and brain was snapped in a rain of tears that probably saved his reason.

'Don't ky,' said Dody, kissing Frank's face; 'mummy not like you to ky; mummy *love* you, and Dody love you too.'

Perhaps if Mr. Eyre could have wept, he would not now be lying in the next room hovering betwixt life and death, so that it seemed likely but one grave would be required for husband and wife; but when his paroxysm was over, Frank felt the power in him to do that which it had hitherto unnerved him even to think of.

He carried Dody back to his mother's door, and, knowing his obedience, bade him stand without, for he would be back directly; then, with the door open and the little child behind it, Frank approached the bed upon which Madcap lay.

He gently lifted the linen from her face. His heart gave one convulsive shudder, and stood still. No tears must fall there, and the oath that he had come to swear by her pale cold body died on his lips. Not of the death she had died, but of that life upon which she had entered, he thought as he looked upon her:

> 'This could ne'er my true love be;
> She was full of hope and light,
> And the lilies on her breast
> Could not yet have faded quite. . . .'

Somehow these were the thoughts that came into his head then . . . . 'And so all my love could not save thee, Madcap?' he said aloud, in his anguish . . . . 'Save thee! . . . . Art thou not better off there than here?' He covered his face with his hands, then, with one last long look, replaced the linen, and left the room.

'You has been a welly long time,' said Dody, sighing, as Frank lifted him in his arms, and thought it but another vexatious delay, when, half-way downstairs, Frank paused, and laid his ear against the child's chest to listen.

It was but a slight sound that he heard; but it seemed to come from Frank's own breast, as he clasped Dody nearer to him, and asked him if he had any pain.

'Oh, yes,' said Dody, wrinkling up his nose with an air of consequence, and laying his hand on the bosom of his frock; 'sumfin' here. But mummy 'll make it well for me,' he added, nodding.

'Mummy is asleep,' said Frank, 'and Dody would not like to vex her, and Frank will stay with him, and play games;' he paused, groaning, and turned aside—he could not bear the child's clear eyes upon him, and thought himself turning into a woman, so incapable was he of self-control. . . .

'But she'll wake up bimeby,' said Dody, with perfect faith; 'and we'll take her the nosegay,' he added, even while Frank noted that the flowers had already withered in the grasp of the little feverish hand.

He carried him to the nursery, where Josephine sat, crying bitterly, while Doune stood beside her, frowning, and the very picture of revolt.

'I'll *kill* him!' he said, stamping his foot, and without perceiving Frank; 'naughty Digges to hurt my mamma—when I'm a big man I'll shoot him dead;' then all

at once threw himself face downward on the ground, crying out, '*Mother, mother!*'

Dody running to him, showed him his nosegay, telling him that they would both go to see mummy presently; but Doune thrust him away.

'You're too little,' he said; 'you can't understand. She's *dead!*'

'No,' said Dody; 'grandpapa's dead—mummy put fowers over his head; but mummy's only gone to sleep—Frank says so. Didn't you, Frank?'

Frank turned aside and asked for pen and ink, then sat down with Dody on his knee, who watched him with deepest interest as he wrote a telegraphic message to the most famous doctor of the day for diseases of the chest.

'But,' said Josephine, who had looked over his shoulder, 'the other doctor will be here soon for master. Can he not prescribe also for Master Dody?'

But Frank shook his head; and having despatched the message, returned to Dody, who was rapidly developing every symptom of inflammation of the lungs, and long before nightfall was tossing in his bed, the withered flowers still firmly clutched in his burning hand, his little, unceasing, wistful plaint for his mother piercing Frank's heart. He was weary of telling the child that she slept, and Doune's absence (for he had mysteriously disappeared, and could not be found either in the house or grounds) caused him a new anxiety.

And alone, in the room adjoining Madcap's, Mr. Eyre lay, struck down by the hand of God at the very moment he most required his strength, his stertorous breathing alone giving sign that he was numbered still in the ranks of the living.

The great man, who arrived from London that afternoon, could give small hope of him. He feared serous apoplexy, and that Mr. Eyre might die unconscious; but there was no likelihood of a change for probably another twenty-four hours.

Later in the day came another visitor to the house, who took Dody on his knee, and asked to see his toys, listening, as if in play, to his chest; then, after awhile, laid him gently back in his little bed, and thinking Frank the father, told the truth.

The child might live three days, it was possible that he would not last out two. There was lung-mischief of long standing, precipitated into violent inflammation by a severe chill.

Dody smiled, and waved his hand to the great man when he went away; but during the night began to wander, and by daybreak had gone a long, long step of the journey that was to take him to his mother.

They had found Doune at last, rigid with cold and grief, beneath the sheet by Madcap's side—her chill hand in both his own, his aching head pressed to the bosom that would never shelter or warm him any more . . . . but he did not resist when they brought him away, nor did Dody's illness seem to move him

—he crept into the darkest corner of the nursery, thrusting away the food they would have him eat. Frank realized then, as he had never done before, the intense power of loving that lay in that little heart, and knew how, of the two, Dody's lot was the happier.

The tumult of confusion and horror without, at the crime committed, could not penetrate to the sick-chamber in which, night and day, Frank sate. He would see no one, take no steps to assist justice; for to him the sick fancies of a dying child were of more moment then than the bringing to death the slayer of his lost Madcap; and all day long, fasting and sleepless, he looked at the panorama of Dody's short young life that the child's babblings unrolled to his gaze . . . . all the great little events of his three years, all told—his childish troubles, joys, thoughts . . . . each secret of the little crystal mind laid bare before him . . . . I wonder how many there are of us who could bear such a scrutiny as that to which a child unconsciously abandons itself . . . . we stifle our impulses or disguise them, but the child has no art to hide his . . . . if we had time to pause and study the drama of the child, we should no longer dream of God, but understand Him . . . . and so long as there is an innocent little one in our midst, there is not one among us who shall dare to say it has not been given to him to look into an angel's heart.

And while he tossed in his little bed, Josephine,

grown old and haggard-looking in a night, passed to and fro, mistress of the situation, and virtually of the house, recognised even by those who shrank from her as the sole person who had been able to meet the awful emergencies of the night and day.

To the questions of the detective, who had already arrived from town, she replied with a brevity and sense that contrasted favourably with the confusion of manner exhibited by the other servants, and even when asked if she had made that speech to Digges, to which the cook swore, she replied in the affirmative, but remarked that the man had had no more to do with the crime than herself.

If it had already crossed more than one mind that she herself, with Digges's assistance, had committed the crime, no one dared utter the accusation in her presence ; though when she was alone an awful look of fear came into her face, and a shuddering memory of the gallows she had seen erected for Janet Stork, took possession of her mind.

All that day justice waited, or moved in the wrong direction, while the search for the missing diamonds was carried on from attic to cellar, with the exception of that room in which the dead lay, and the nursery.

As the night drew on, Dody became much worse, and wandered more—talked of his little kitten, begging Josephine to take care of it while he was away, and lay it in her bed each night to keep it warm—thought it was prayer-time, and repeated a verse of

his evening hymn, breaking off into a merry laugh as he cried out, '*Saw* the Pincess of Wales, mummy!' then, as though in answer to some question of his mother, added earnestly, 'She looked very *luffly!*'—babbled of his little baby-girl, and of how he would wheel her about in his little 'pram'—whispered in Frank's ear that he was going to get up early to pick mummy a birthday flower, but he must not tell Doune . . . . then, as he grew weaker, talked less, but lay quietly in Frank's arms, patiently enduring those useless remedies that had been ordered, and that gradually the young man ceased, feeling them to be a needless cruelty.

Doune looked on with a bursting heart; he knew they were going to put his mother in a great black box like the one that had taken away grandfather, and he feared they were going to take Dody away in it too. But mother was silent, and Dody could talk and laugh . . . . perhaps it was all an ugly dream, and he would wake up to-morrow to find everything just as usual . . . . and he climbed into his brother's bed at last, and fell asleep beside him. But as the night advanced, Dody grew rapidly worse, and Frank, who had sent Josephine to bed, took the little restless body in his arms, and walked with him to and fro.

In the deadest hour of the night, when the silent house showed from the outside but three lights in its windows, for the dying, the unconscious, and the dead, Frank heard footsteps come heavily up the

stone steps from the garden, and a moment after, a hand groping for the lock.

His heart beat so violently that Dody stirred in his uneasy doze; in that moment he knew the awful fear that had haunted him, and which now took shape in what stood without, not daring to knock and demand admission.

For awhile he stood rigid, his eyes fixed on the door, half expecting it, though locked, to part and disclose a terrible figure to his eyes; but the moments passed, and an absolute silence prevailed.

He sat down with the child in his arms, and moistened the feverish lips with a cooling drink, carefully covered up the little burning limbs, all with no sign of haste, but intensely conscious of one thing only, that outside that locked door something crouched, and he must see it. He crossed the room, and laid Dody down by his brother's side, and Doune, half waking, clasped his arms about him, so that they looked but two happy little lads fallen asleep on one pillow as Frank turned away.

He lifted a corner of the blind, and saw opposite him the light burning in the room in which his lost, his murdered Madcap lay . . . . his heart grew cold as ice, and the blood seemed to stagnate and grow chill in his veins as he moved towards the door; and after a minute, in which his hand refused its office, unlocked the outer door, and set it open.

Something raised itself up, and came slowly towards

him, then falling back, said, in a hollow, starved voice, like one in whom the life has sunk too low to furnish strength with which to cry out—

'I wanted Josephine. . . .'

By the light that came through the door behind him, he saw her plainly—haggard, wild-faced, and travel-stained, while about her right hand, outstretched as in fear, was tied a handkerchief soaked through and through with blood.

As he stood, not speaking, but with his arm outstretched as barrier to her entrance, a change came over her features; she tottered, and almost fell, then—

'He is dying—he is *dead!*' she cried.

'He is ill,' said Frank; 'but why do you come to him like a thief in the night? Where have you been all yesterday and to-day?'

She half looked over her shoulder to that light which burned in the opposite wing; then, with a shudder and gasping cry, pushed past him, and ran into the nursery, where, seeing the little brothers asleep, and leaning their heads to each other, she fell down on her knees beside them, uttering a faint 'Thank God!' Outcast, and a something intangible that in Frank's eyes shaped itself to guilt, were written on her face when she looked up and met his eyes; then, as one whose thoughts escape her, she said, in a whisper—

'She's dead. Do they know who killed her?'

He came near to her; then said—his loathing eyes glancing at and away from her blood-stained hand—

'Go now—escape before it is too late—for her sake—because there must be no scandal over her grave. I will let you go; by to-morrow it may be too late to hide yourself from Mr. Eyre.'

She looked at him vacantly, almost with the expression of an imbecile; and the thought crossed his mind that she was indeed mad, and not accountable for her deeds; but in the same moment Dody's painful breathing arrested her attention, and she cried fiercely, as she sprang up, and bent over the child—

'He's more than ill, he's dying. What have you done to him while I've been away?'

She stooped to lift him, but Frank put her aside.

'Can you touch him with those hands?' he added, certain by now that they were stained with Madcap's blood.

She looked down at them for a moment; then, as Frank took the child in his arms, she fell on her knees, and with a terrible gesture of longing—

'*I* have loved him best,' she cried, 'give him to *me*!'

At that wild mother-cry, rent from a bleeding heart, Dody opened his eyes with a start, and saw her. He smiled and stretched out his arms—

'Have 'oo come back?' he said. 'But mummy's been to sleep such a long, long while, me *can't* wake her,' he added, shaking his head sorrowfully.

She dragged herself on her knees to where Frank had moved, and prayed him, for the love of God, to let her hold the child in her arms but for one moment;

but Dody took the matter out of his hands by struggling down, and throwing his arms round her neck.

'Seep wiz mummy!' he said, as his head fell on that soiled and weary bosom, to which for the moment he had brought back life and strength.

And Frank had not the courage to drag them apart, but stood aside, as she sat down on a low chair and rocked the child in her arms. Only he could not endure the sight, and with head sunk in his hands, threw himself down in a distant part of the nursery, and before long, worn out by the fatigues of the previous day and night, was betrayed into a profound slumber.

Hester held her breath to hearken to his, until sure that he slept; then with a wild look round and upwards, as one who sees help neither in God nor man, laid her haggard face down on the child's head, and through the chill hours of the night watched him, till with wakening morn the fever and restlessness in him grew; then as daylight looked in at the unshuttered window, and on the sill without a bird boldly shot a ringing note, a shadow darkened the little face on which the watcher's heart hung, and for the last time on earth he opened his eyes.

'Maïy Kismus, mummy!' he cried, in a clear, loud voice, as thinking that it was Yule-tide, and he had risen early to wish her a happy one . . . . and so, stretching out his arms to Hester, as though she were

his mother, he went but one step alone . . . . and Madcap was never lonely any more, for Dody had found her.

* * * * *

When Frank awakened out of the dreamless slumber into which he had sunk, it was to hear Hester's voice talking to what she held on her knees; and as he started up, shaking the sleep from his eyes, he thought, angrily, that she must be mad to disturb the child so.

Her eyes were dry, her voice was hard and uneven. She had uncovered his feet, and held them in one hand. . . . .

'Little feet,' she said, 'that will never ache, or stumble, or trip on life's path—little heart that will never suffer, or grow hard and cold—always young, always loving little hands that might have done great work in the world, but will never fail now, nor succeed . . . . little lips that never said a cruel word, though often and often they've prayed for some little thing and been denied—and Josephine was unkind to you till I bribed her—as if a tender thing like you had got a chance against a grown person . . . . and the more cruel we are, the surer you are to come to us sooner or later with the tears running down your little cheeks, saying "Me *good* now" . . . . we are so strong and you so weak, you can only fight us with your toys. . . . .

'O God!' she cried, breaking off suddenly in her monotonous talk; 'he's dead—he's *dead* . . . . and

I've been talking to him, forgetting that he couldn't hear. . . . .'

But long before the half-crazed woman had ceased to babble, Frank, realizing that his darling had set out on his long, long journey without one word or kiss to him of farewell, had fallen on his knees beside the little lifeless body, moved to a passion of grief for the child, that even the sight of his dead beloved Madcap had not been able to rouse in his heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

'It's I will kiss your bonny cheek,
And I will kiss your chin,
And I will kiss your cold-clay lip,
But I'll ne'er kiss woman again.'

THE moment that saw the extinction of one life at the Red Hall saw the awakening of another. Mr. Eyre quietly opened his eyes, sat up and looked about him; his brain was perfectly clear, yet he thought he must be dreaming ; for why was he sleeping here—and where was Madcap?

Hurling the clothes to right and left of him, he rose, and, like a grim, gaunt spectre, half clothed, reached the door, just as the terrified attendant, aroused, saw him disappear through the doorway—a second Lazarus raised from the dead.

He went straight to his wife's bed, but in the dim light did not observe the watcher, who sat by the side

of it. He paused a moment, as if at fault, said 'Madcap—wife,' then drew the linen aside, as though instinct told him she was there.

At the sight of that young familiar face, wrapped in an ineffable peace, through which a smile shone, as though she hearkened to music inaudible to grosser ears, the unhappy man stood as though struck to stone; then, in one overwhelming wave, the full tide of memory rushed over him: he remembered all, even to the oath he had been in the act of swearing by her dead body, when the finger of God had touched, and struck him to earth.

That half-uttered vow was still unfulfilled; but neither God nor man should hinder him now. He took that gentle body in his arms—of the first time that he had kissed her living, he now thought, as for the first time he kissed her dead, and swore aloud an oath that he would neither sleep nor eat, till he had found, and delivered up to justice, the hand that had slain her.

He covered her face, and, with a firm step, walked into the adjoining room. Battling with his weakness, he was more than half dressed when Frank, who had been hastily summoned by the attendant, came in.

'What is being done?' said Mr. Eyre at once, as he proceeded rapidly with his dressing. 'You have not allowed her to escape? She is safe in the gaol yonder? Curse this weakness,' he added, as the sweat poured from his brow, 'that has kept *her* death unavenged so long!'

'She is not in gaol,' said Frank, 'but she has not escaped.'

'You have been idle—you have sat down with folded hands while I was laid by?' said Mr. Eyre, in a voice of bitterest condemnation.

'Hush,' said Frank, with a gesture towards the closed door, 'we cannot be certain that Hester did it—more likely the diamonds were the incentive—remember that by incriminating her, you rake up the old story and do dishonour to *her* memory.'

'My sins cannot dim her purity or her peace,' said Mr. Eyre, 'but Hester Clarke shall die!' And with a fictitious strength he strode down the gallery and staircase, while Frank followed, hoping to prevent Mr. Eyre seeing Hester while his dead child yet lay in her arms.

But in the hall a constable was standing with one or two jurymen, together with the coroner who had held inquiry upon Madcap's death.

They started back at the sight of Mr. Eyre—pale, gaunt, a blood-like tinge in his hollow eyes, his brow and lips firm as quarried marble.

'Gentlemen,' he said at once, 'what arrests have you made?'

'The evidence against Digges was very strong,' replied the coroner—'a tramp also, who was seen hanging about here that night is being searched for.'

'You may release Digges,' said Mr. Eyre calmly; 'the murderess is the woman Hester Clarke, and I

command you instantly to commit her to prison on charge of the wilful murder of my wife.'

'It was on that business we came,' said the constable nervously; 'we have the warrant here,' and he produced it. 'Certain information came to our knowledge last night that throws grave suspicion upon her.'

'To your work then!' cried Mr. Eyre impatiently; then, as they looked at one another, a low whisper passing between them, added, 'Why are you here?' The constable scratched his head, and looked at the coroner, the coroner looking imploringly at a short juryman, who consulted a lean one, but no aid being forthcoming from that quarter, they one and all maintained an absolute silence.

'Can't you speak?' cried Mr. Eyre, regarding them with fierce scorn. 'Stand out of the way, then; I will find and arrest this woman myself.'

'If you please, sir,' said an officious housemaid, who had overheard the whole colloquy, 'Mrs. Clarke is upstairs in the nursery, with poor Master Dody'—and the girl wiped her eyes with her apron.

'Poor Master Dody?' repeated Mr. Eyre, looking at her earnestly; 'but come,' he added, and they all followed him with fear in their faces, as he led the way towards the nurseries.

'For God's sake, Eyre,' cried Frank, overtaking him, 'do not go on! She will not escape. I pledge you my soul she will not escape, only do not see her

now'—but Mr. Eyre thrust him aside, threw the nursery door open, and advanced to the middle of the room.

'Constable,' he said, 'do your duty. I give this woman in charge for the murder of my wife.'

He had seen only her as she sate crouched together on the low chair with something close huddled up in her arm, but now his eyes travelled downwards, and rested on it. Was death in his own eyes, or in all he looked upon? He went a few steps nearer, and as he approached, she laid the child across her knees, and looked up at him.

'*Her* child;' he said; 'murderess! and you dare to touch him!'

Their eyes met—a kind of rapt horror and breathless wonder in hers, a deadly hatred and bitter loathing in his own.

'You accuse me of . . . . murder?' she said slowly.

Frank lifted Dody out of her unresisting arms . . . it seemed a profanation of that little tender body to lie between two who looked as these were looking on each other.

'Do your duty,' said Mr. Eyre, turning to the constable; 'remove her at once.'

As the man approached, she made a wild gesture as of struggle—in reality she was fighting for breath—gasping for the reason that seemed to be deserting her; but the constable had expected trouble, and was prepared for it.

A click was heard as Hester tossed her clasped hands upwards. She seemed hardly to know they were secured, only, as the man would have led her away, she wrested herself free of him, and ran to where Frank had laid Dody down in his little bed, in which he looked as though he slept.

As she stretched her arms to him, the rivets of steel checked her ; but the wild stricken look went out of her face as she stooped and kissed her darling's little hands, his lips, his neck ; then with a firm step walked, the constable beside her, to the door.

Opposite Mr. Eyre she paused, her lips moved, a look that should have found a response in his sprang from her eyes, but she found nothing; and suddenly growing cold, and as one whom some sinister sight appals, she disappeared, half led, half carried, from the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'Open thyself, O Earth! and press not heavily;
Be easy of access and of approach to him;
As mother with her robe her child,
So do thou cover him, O Earth!'

A PROCESSION wound gently down the hill, the girls' voices sounded sweetly as they went, and made a long echo through the winding street, so that a stranger on horseback who met the children going before, dressed in white, with white flowers in their little hands, asked

them if they were bound for a bridal. To which they replied, 'Master, it is a white burying;' while the older ones, who followed after, answered only with tears, 'It is the burying of our lady with her child.'

He wondered, and drew aside. He thought that only the funeral of a maiden or a very young child had been thus; but she must have been one of those whose souls had been:

'Prepared to touch
The whitest thought, nor soil it much . . .'

and as he mused, with the low sound of weeping in the air, there passed him six young girls, who bore upon their shoulders something covered with a snow-white pall, heaped up with virgin flowers that scattered an exquisite fragrance on the air around.

Following them came young children, also dressed in white. Their voices took up the dying echo of those who had gone before, and had a silvery sound in the clear soft air . . . .

'Thou hast stilled
Now thy little lamb's brief weeping.
Ah! how peaceful, lone and mild!
In its narrow bed it's sleeping!
And no sign of anguish sore
Heaves that little bosom more.'

The voices ceased. Those before took up the strain, but this time they sang of *her*.

The chief mourner came in sight, wrapped in his black cloak, bare-headed, with no outward trapping

of woe, save only the set face, the measured step, the hard-won composure that men make shift to bring to such an occasion as this.

He walked alone. Doune, who was to have followed beside him, had fallen behind and taken the hand of Frank, upon whom all eyes that day were fixed. Yet so noble was his face, so manly his air, so deep and bitter his grief, that women found it in their hearts to speak aloud their thoughts of him as he passed, the little child clinging to his hand.

After him came the Duke, and behind him the head of every family in the county with whom Mr. Eyre had been acquainted; last of all the farmers and the villagers, all bare-headed, and they made a long and weeping following as they passed on foot through the village, and up the hill to where the churchyard lay.

The air breathed softly—it was one of those days that Madcap had loved, when involuntarily one looked around for the violets that must surely be springing, and the scent of the thousand flowers that Frank's love had procured confirmed the idea; but Mr. Eyre, as he crushed a blossom beneath his foot, thought of Madcap's wish, how she might die in spring, 'with good store of flowers to cover her. . . .'

There was not standing-room in the little churchyard for the thousands who had come from far and near to the burying, and the voice of the clergyman was often inaudible for the sobs of those who pressed

around him. Mr. Eyre alone made no sign, but stood with folded arms and bent head, as one who heard not a syllable that was uttered, or saw one of the faces out of all those present.

As they lowered the coffin into the grave, the sun, that had got behind a cloud, suddenly shone out; at the same moment came a burst of singing from the young girls, that drowned the bitter weeping heard on every side.

It ceased. The sobs were not renewed; they had died in the triumphant joy of those drawn-out, lingering notes, and all felt that howsoe'er it might be with them, with her all was *well.*

And so they left them there, the young mother and her child. Be very sure that Dody did not feel the coldness of her breast; be sure that he was happy in that long, long sleep with her, that he had so often coveted, and that some other where—ah, God! that we might know *where*—warm and living, their freed souls dwelled in happiness together.

CHAPTER XIX.

'I wish my grave were growing green,
A winding-sheet drawn o'er my een,
And I in Helen's arms lying,
On fair Kirkconnel lea.'

MR. EYRE'S indomitable will had enabled him to preserve a calm demeanour that day; but it was

characteristic of him that he did not pause a moment by Madcap's grave, but turning aside, and with no word or look to those who had come from so far to do her honour, walked alone to his house, and ascending to his wife's room, shut himself in, and locked the door.

The glance that he threw around spoke of reason on the very verge of overthrow; yet it was with the fixed resolve to grapple with, and master something in his brain which for ever eluded him, that he advanced to a cabinet that stood on one side of the room.

It was remarkable neither for its usefulness nor its beauty, but as Mr. Eyre touched it, a distinct impression of some recent experience connected with it fixed his attention; and as an ordinary weapon may become unique through some especial use to which it has been put, so Mr. Eyre found a curious fascination in a thing that he had seen every day for six years of his life, without once consciously observing it.

His fingers wandered over it, and seemed to pause without his will at a certain handle. Strange! he could have sworn that not long ago he had opened that very drawer, either to seek something that was there, or to lay it away. Mechanically he drew it towards him, and saw that it was empty.

The cabinet stood back from the light; but as he remained, with his eyes fixed on the open drawer, he saw that a dark red stain crossed it obliquely—it was the stain of blood.

He pressed one clenched hand to his brow. Surely

he had got the clue now that he had lost during the stupor in which he had two days lain . . . . but no; it had escaped him before that, for even as he staunched the blood that flowed from Madcap's side on that fatal night, his mind had been projecting itself backwards in a futile effort to remember something similar that had happened previously. Even Madcap herself impressed him with a strong sense of unreality quite distinct from dreaming, or rather, it was like being reminded of a dream that he had forgotten, till the actual presentment of it brought all its details to his mind.

Step by step he forced himself to follow the events of that evening, remembered leaving Frank and Madcap in the drawing-room, and sitting down to his writing, over which, though his brain had never been clearer, he must have been overcome by one of those sudden fits of sleep that sometimes followed any severe excitement to which he had been subjected, and from this sleep he had been wakened by the shriek above that had caused him hastily to ascend the spiral staircase that led from his study to the bedroom, where he had found Madcap alone and unconscious, seated in a chair drawn close to the open window.

But beyond and beneath these distinct memories, he was conscious of an abyss whose brink he approached with strong shudderings, yet fiercer will, but from which he found himself, as by some unknown

force, dragged back at the very moment when he was on the point of piercing its depths . . . . strange lightnings passed through his mind, revealing hidden places, yet never that one sealed chamber which was locked against him ; a moving chaos of half-seen visions and strangled recollections contended in him for recognition, while, driven with fury from opposite points of the compass, a crowd of ideas met and jostled each other in his brain, stunning him with the roar and confusion of a tempest. He had dared to pluck the curtain from the inmost recesses of his soul, and what did they give back to him in answer? Confused echoes, uncertain replies, like a face guessed at in troubled waters.

As, worn out with fasting and agony, he covered his eyes, slowly from the background of a night black as pitch, he thought an apparition rose . . . . it was tinged with flame, blood dripped from its raiment and its hands. Above its hollow eyes there gleamed a star, and that too was of blood-colour, and he recognised it for the spirit of murder, and knew that the hand hidden in its breast clutched a weapon . . . . he glanced aside, and there, pale and dimly illumined by the flame that glowed from her, crouched the shape of a man made in his own image, who seemed to importune her aid . . . . suddenly she drew the weapon from its sheath, pointed, and bade him strike.

A second figure rose within ken, of a woman dressed in white—the face was hidden, and her attitude was

of one who slept—the man advancing with a species of blind fury, stabbed it to the heart; then with a gesture of joy, tore the covering from its face, to taste the fruits of his deed. But what is this? He draws back—he hurls the weapon from him—he kneels by the murdered shape—he clasps its hands—he calls on it with tears and cries to reply to him; but it is silent: it has no power to reply, and he turns, with a terrible gesture of despair and upbraiding, to the spirit, who looks calmly on, with a smile, then pointing to his blood-stained hand, vanishes.

With the sweat on his brow, Mr Eyre staggered to his feet, and gazed around him.

There stood the bed upon which she had lain, upon which she might be lying now—the beautiful, the beloved—had not the spirit of murder, that had entered in at the open door of his soul, in some awful inexplicable way, passed Hester by, to return in other shape, to wreak itself upon what he guarded more jealously than his own life?

It was as if a man had resolved to slay his enemy with some instrument over which he had secretly gloated, and that he had often looked for an opportunity of using (sheathed and laid safe away where none could find it), and one day this very enemy had tracked him to his place of hiding, and with that very steel had stabbed his nearest and dearest to the heart. . . .

He knew himself to be a murderer in intent, if not

in deed, that the homicidal impulse that had moved him in the hayfield had, on the occasion of Hester's threatening to harm Madcap, hardened itself into a rooted determination to kill her, rather than that his wife should be allowed to suffer; and if he had by a hair's-breadth escaped the crime, he was at heart guilty as though his hand had committed it. He clenched that hand now in a fury of impotence, and cursed it that when by striking it might have saved Madcap's life, it had forborne to lift itself; and so he was ruined and undone for ever.

Hester should die; but that would not bring Madcap back, and as the miserable man gazed around the deserted room, meeting at every hand those mute tokens of her late presence that make the pitiful language by which our dead speak to us, vengeance showed to him as dust and ashes, and hatred of Hester died in his breast, as, thinking only of *her*, he stretched out his hands to the empty air, and cursed his Maker that he was not lying in her arms beneath the sod.

CHAPTER XX.

'Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?'

AND now to hear what the outside world—'respectability with its thousand gigs'—had said to the deed of violence committed at the Red Hall. Within twelve

hours of Mrs. Eyre's death, the whole country-side was ringing with it; the house was besieged by persons who came from far and near to ask if the dread report were true, and to glean such details of the tragedy as they might.

The scandals that had been afloat concerning Madcap were forgotten in the horror her fate excited—only her youth and sweetness were remembered now, and an indignant throb of pity for the murdered, of hatred for the murderer, thrilled every heart.

The disappearance of the diamonds reduced the crime to one of simple greed; but there were persons, of whom Mrs. Transome was one, who boldly declared that they did not believe a word about the diamonds, but felt sure Mr. Eyre had killed her in a fit of jealousy at her flirtation with Lord Lovel.

But this idea—for Mr. Eyre's devotion to his wife was well known, and no greater proof of his love could be asked than the unconscious, possibly dying, state in which he now lay—was received coldly; and, indeed, the first confusion and horror had scarcely subsided, when it became known that the man Digges was released, and the woman Hester Clarke, after a short preliminary inquiry, been committed to take her trial on the capital charge at the next assizes. And then the public curiosity, that had slackened a little over so dull a criminal as the gardener, rose to fever-heat, as, bit by bit, the circumstances oozed out that were said to have led to her arrest.

Lord Lovel had been at the Red Hall on that fatal night, and his discarded mistress had followed him there, and, stung to jealous madness, had gained access to Mrs. Eyre, and stabbed her to the heart, then escaped before the murder was discovered; this was the first account bruited abroad. A second declared that Mr. Eyre, supposed to be engaged below, had discovered Lord Lovel hidden in the house after he had ostensibly left it, and that in the struggle which ensued, Mr. Eyre had snatched up a weapon, that had pierced Madcap as she threw herself between the two men, her cries bringing the gardener to the rescue, who was forthwith seized by the servants as the murderer.

A third account emphatically denied the two former ones, and said that the murder had been committed by a tramp, who had been refused alms at the servants' hall, and, hanging about the place, saw her through the drawing-room windows with the diamonds on her neck and arms, and by means of a ladder placed against the wall, had later on entered her bedroom window, but, finding her awake, had stabbed her, and escaped with his booty.

The pathetic circumstances of Madcap's death, the knowledge of how she had been but a dying woman when her child was born, silenced more than one pestilent tongue, and gradually, during the fortnight that elapsed between her death and the opening of the assizes at Marmiton, the opinion that she had been

more thoughtless than sinning gained ground, while the strong impression against Hester Clarke deepened.

That after two days' flight she should have been arrested in the Red Hall itself, with the dead child of its murdered mistress on her knees, was held as but another proof of her guilt. It is the fascination that the victim has for the slayer that leads to so many convictions, and Hester's affection for the child being unknown beyond the village, her presence at his death was supposed to be the result of mere accident.

Meanwhile the Duke and Duchess had unexpectedly returned, he to offer his sympathy and support to Mr. Eyre in his present unhappy position ; she to count the hours till the opening day of the assizes, when, in company with certain other fine ladies of the county, she would occupy a seat whence she could see and hear everything that passed in court, and once more behold the man between whom and herself there was no Madcap to stand now.

BOOK III.—WINNOWED.

CHAPTER I.

'O! little did my mither think
The day she cradled me,
The lands I was to travel in,
Or the death I was to dee!'

THE trial of Hester Clarke commenced on Thursday, November the twelfth, and terminated on the following Saturday evening.

By nine o'clock in the morning the best seats in court were occupied by ladies, and on the bench were the Duke of Marmition and other county magnates, while immediately afterwards those who could not be accommodated with seats on the bench disposed themselves in the body of the court.

The counsel for the prosecution were Mr. Montague, Mr. Chambers, and Mr. Sharp; and for the prisoner, Mr. Valentine and Mr. Flower.

The attorney for the prosecution was Mr. Noble, and for the prisoner Mr. Day.

At half-past nine o'clock, a model of the house in which the murder had been committed was brought

in and placed upon the table in the centre of the court.

At ten o'clock the prisoner, Hester Clarke, was placed in the dock, and the Clerk proceeded to read over the indictment to the prisoner, after which the jury were sworn, and the prisoner, in a low voice, having pleaded *not guilty*, Mr. Montague rose to address the jury for the prosecution.

He commenced by calling upon them to dismiss from their minds any impressions they might previously have formed of the murder of the young, beloved, and beautiful lady who had fallen a victim to the hand of the assassin.

He dwelt upon the awful haste, and the peculiarly pathetic circumstances that had attended her last moments—how, when practically a dying woman, she had yet lingered on till her little prematurely born babe saw the light, and then had died, unconscious to the last of having an enemy in the world, sending with almost her dying breath a message to the prisoner at the bar.

He then proceeded to state that Mrs. Eyre had lately lived in great tranquillity and retirement, her sole visitor being Lord Lovel.

He would presently show that the visits of the latter had an important bearing on the case, but meanwhile he would describe the Red Hall, a model of which lay on the table. From the manner in which it was blocked up by stables and other buildings at

the side, and by the cliff in the rear, it would be shown how almost impossible it was to gain access to Mrs. Eyre's bedroom without attempting it from the front.

There was no question of the servants being concerned in the murder, as they were all below stairs at the time, with the exception of the nurse, who was in conversation with Lord Lovel when the shriek was heard that announced some fatal event, and set everyone rushing towards the wing in which Mrs. Eyre's room was situated.

Not one of them bore her any malice; even the gardener, when arrested for the crime, declared his inability to commit it, because she had always been kind to him, and (to use his own words) he had studied her likes and dislikes even beyond those of his master. There was not a single soul living who could have an unkind impulse towards her save the prisoner at the bar, who had been possessed of the cruellest, most unreasoning madness that can take possession of the human heart—jealousy.

For the innocent intercourse that had taken place between that poor murdered young lady and her old companion and playfellow, Lord Lovel, had been exaggerated, by vulgar report, into a connection very different to the one that existed; and on the evening in question, the prisoner had followed him to the Red Hall, and, herself hidden, been witness to, and auditor of, a conversation that took place between Mrs. Eyre

and Lord Lovel, Mr. Eyre having temporarily withdrawn to the next room.

It would be shown in Lord Lovel's evidence how, after wishing his hostess good-night, he waited awhile for Mr. Eyre, but presently departed, the butler locking the door behind him. But in the moonlight he distinctly saw a figure cross to the wing opposite Mrs. Eyre's room, and in which the nurseries were situated, and quickly following it, found, to all appearance, the rooms untenanted, save by the sleeping children.

The nurse shortly entering, he advanced with her to the inner room ; and he had stood for, perhaps, some five or six minutes conversing with her, when the cry was heard of which mention has been before made.

It was to be remembered that Mr. Eyre and the servants were all below-stairs ; from the back her room was unapproachable, and the only possible manner by which the murderer could have got ingress to it was by a ladder placed against the wall by the gardener that afternoon, and forgotten by him in the discharge of his duties until very late that night; but on this oversight the most important evidence of the whole case hinged, and would be gone into in due course.

On reaching Mrs. Eyre's apartment they were horror-struck to see her bleeding and unconscious, while Mr Eyre himself, roused by her cry, having reached her more quickly than they, by ascending the staircase that led from his study to the bedroom, was staunching the blood that flowed from her side.

Almost immediately afterwards the diamonds she had worn that night were discovered to be missing, and a man seen to be peering in at the window, who was immediately seized upon, and in due course committed for trial.

As prisoner, his lips were closed, but when Mr. Eyre awakened from the stupor into which the death of his wife had thrown him, he immediately ordered the man's release, and demanded the committal of the only person living who could have desired to harm his wife, and so was able to obtain from his gardener the real story of that unhappy night.

That evidence would presently be related; for the present it was sufficient to say that he had forgotten to remove the ladder from the side of the house during the afternoon, and remembering it late at night, and fearing Mr. Eyre's displeasure, had gone up to the Hall, and after watching about some time, was in the act of grasping it for removal, when by its weight he felt that something was on it, and the next moment heard a shriek above him, and head foremost, at the peril of her neck, the prisoner had come rushing down almost into the man's arms. It might be argued that the shriek she gave was of horror at something she had beheld through the open window, but it was far more probable that it escaped her in the sudden fear that possessed her at finding someone at the foot of the ladder and so cutting off her escape, while an innocent person would certainly

have raised an alarm, and, with natural horror, described what she had seen above, instead of fighting with the man like a wild cat (to use his own words), and so escaping him, not a trace of her being found for two whole days. But on the third night she returned secretly to the Red Hall, supposing that the nurse, in whose confidence she appeared to be, would admit her; but Lord Lovel, who was sitting up with Mr. Eyre's sick child, opened the door, and seeing her disordered condition and hand deeply gashed and stained with blood, in the name of mercy, and possibly on account of the past relations that had existed between them, bade her escape while there was yet time, and before Mr. Eyre should awaken from the living death in which he lay, to denounce her.

But in the prisoner's perverted heart a ray of goodness was to be found in the affection she had always borne the dying child, in whom she found some fancied resemblance to the one for whose murder Janet Stork had in that court been tried for murder in May last; but certain evidence would be produced to show that even this pure affection was touched with guilt, as she had long ago made her plans to steal the child, and go away with him, and in the teeth of danger was returning for that very purpose, when she found that the little one was by death escaping to the mother whom he had loved above all else on earth. It would be shown that the prisoner was doubly jealous of the victim, both by her belief

that Lord Lovel secretly adored, while he profoundly honoured, Mrs. Eyre, and because she was unable to detach the child's superior love from his mother to herself, thus mixing the basest alloy with that pure affection which might have been her saving, had she permitted it full play. Early next morning the child died, and in the same moment Mr. Eyre awakened from the deadly stupor that had held him in its grip, and his just impulse being to bring to justice the slayer of his beloved wife, and instinct guiding him in the right direction, he mustered strength to descend to the hall, where, unknown to him, the constable waited with a warrant for the apprehension of the prisoner in his hand. Within five minutes she was arrested with the little dead child on her knees, and on being led away and searched in goal, there was found in her pocket a long, narrow knife, with a slender handle, and a corresponding stain of blood in the pocket, proving that it must have been placed there when wet and dripping with the blood of the victim. But there was one piece of evidence more damning than all, which irrevocably chained the accused to the deed; it was this. The housemaid who had been deputed to set the room in order after its unhappy mistress's death, had, in the natural fear and horror of the situation, performed her duties but carelessly, so that she had overlooked a fact that the detective had the next day discovered, viz., a torn piece of a woman's dress caught in a projecting nail

on the back of the chair in which the victim had been seated when surprised by the murderer. This fragment of clothing had been found to exactly fit a piece missing from the front of the prisoner's gown while the gash on her hand answered to the width of the knife found in her pocket, and might be conjectured to have been accidentally inflicted on herself, while stabbing at the poor young lady. That she should have entered the room, and left it before the murder had been committed, was proved to be an impossibility, by the fact of her having the dripping knife in her possession, unless it was to be supposed that she had wilfully, and for the purpose of attracting suspicion to herself, in cold blood, inflicted the wound upon her own flesh.

If he were obliged to anticipate the defence, it was because he was entirely in the dark as to what might be set up ; and if it was urged that the prisoner neither gained by, nor could have any motive for, the crime, he would reply that such was the intricate constitution of the human mind, that there were motives no one could conceive. Perhaps the prisoner had thought that, her honourable, beloved rival once removed, she would be first in Lord Lovel's affections, and in the heart of the child she profoundly loved ; but if she had no motive, who could have had one ?

True, the jewels Mrs. Eyre wore that night had disappeared ; but when it was to be remembered that a crowd of servants had been let loose in the room,

altogether demoralized by the confusion of the situation, it was impossible to say that, beneath that temptation which creates thieves, the diamonds had not been snatched up and hidden away, to appear in other form when the hue and cry after them was past. The committal of the man Digges had been a blunder of justice for which there was no accounting; had he been guilty, he would not deliberately have shown himself to the assembled household at a moment when all eyes naturally were seeking for the murderer.

It would be said that the evidence was merely circumstantial, and this was so; but if all the parts, if each atom, of the evidence were complete, he thought it was as conclusive evidence as could be had. The parts of evidence must not be considered separately, but taken altogether; and if the chain of proof were complete, the objection to such proof fell to the ground. He would now call those witnesses who, if they contradicted neither each other nor themselves, might be considered to give something better than even direct evidence.

He then proceeded to tell the jury their duty in the case before him. It was one that required firm minds and upright hearts, with clear and intelligent understandings.

Should their verdict be an acquittal, it must be in the teeth of overwhelming testimony to the contrary. If, on the other hand, they found a verdict of guilty, it would afford satisfaction to those who, taking into

consideration the youth and blamelessness of the victim, could find no parallel to its cruelty in the history of crime.

He spoke for twenty minutes, but this was the gist of his speech. When he reseated himself, from the Judge downwards, there was only one person present who had not mentally registered a verdict of guilty against the prisoner.

The first witness to the accusation was the man Digges.

Ashen-hued, trembling, his knees knocking together with fear, he was placed more dead than alive in the box. When called upon to take the oath, he stared idiotically, uttering such uncouth howls as set the whole court into stifled laughter, and could not be got to touch the Bible, being fully persuaded that whatever he did would conduce to his ruin—and only on catching Mr. Eyre's eye and receiving from him a reassuring glance, showed any sign of recovering his scattered wits.

And so the inquiry into the bitter tragedy of Madcap's death began with broadest farce, for the sense of what the man said seemed actually lost in the absurdity of how he looked while saying it—though the sum total dragged bit by bit from his unwilling lips, and omitting all legal wrangles, was as follows:—

On the afternoon of the murder, he had placed a ladder against his mistress's window for the purpose

of removing some weeds that were growing round it; but being wanted by the cook for some kitchen-stuff, he had forgotten the ladder till reminded of it by his master, who had come into the hothouse about four o'clock, and had told him to saddle a horse and ride to the nearest town where exotics might be purchased, and to bring back all that he could find.

In doing this he had forgotten the ladder, and, after arranging the flowers, had gone home for his supper and to bed; but at half-past ten he had woke up, and remembered the ladder, and how his master, who might be smoking a cigar out of doors that evening, would probably see it; and be angry with him for disobeying his orders, on the morrow. He had therefore put on his clothes, and gone up to the Hall, but to reach the ladder he must pass the drawing-room and library windows. The window of the latter was partly up, and he saw his master sitting at a table writing, his head resting on his hand. The drawing-room window was also open, and as much as could be seen of the room behind, brightly lit ('all of a muck of candles,' in Digges' vernacular), and he drew back when he saw two people in the window, so frightened that he had much ado not to cry out. Asked why he was frightened, he said that one was his mistress, and she had got fire playing all about her head, and neck, and arms. He wondered Lord Lovel did not try to put it out, but they were just talking quietly, as if there was nothing the matter at all. He got a bit nearer,

and thought she must have got a swarm of fire-flies dangling round her made into a necklace and head-piece. Diamonds? He had heard of such things, but he had never seen them, though he supposed they meant a deal of money. If those were diamonds she had got on, he had many a time seen glow-worms give a handsomer light, and yet they weren't worth no money to speak of. Did they see him? No, they were talking 'courting-like;' and here the unhappy man, with a terrified look at his master, relapsed into contortions more frightful than before. A slight smile of pity curled Mr. Eyre's lips as he looked at him, but Digges, seeing the smile, took heart, and thought that his master was not angry. What were Lord Lovel and his mistress saying? He didn't know that he could answer that; folks had no business to repeat things that they overheard. But on being browbeaten and bullied, and on receiving a slight nod from Mr. Eyre, Digges very unwillingly and frowningly made reply:

'She said as how she'd allus luv'd him, and ever should, and he took her hand and kissed it as if it was ever so,' faltered out Digges; and all present turned to look at Mr. Eyre, who stood, with lips and brow firm as a rock, as indifferent to their gaze as though he were alone. Frank, too, showed no emotion, only his face took an added shade of sadness; it seemed to him so deep a dishonour to Madcap's memory that her innocent words should be thus blared aloud in court.

'Did you hear or see anything further?' was the next question.

'No!'—he didn't listen; he didn't think nought of what he heard—the ways of quality weren't as poor folks' ways; and, having nothing else to do, it seemed to pass the time like with them to say what they didn't mean. But as he couldn't get round to the ladder, he thought he would go to the kitchen, and bide there a bit till the window was shut and the company gone. He looked in at the library window as he passed, but Mr. Eyre was not at the table; he was standing by a door that led into the drawing-room, close to the open window, and he supposed Mr. Eyre was going through that way into the drawing-room.

At this speech, Mr. Eyre was observed to start, and look at him sternly and fixedly—hitherto he had worn a look of encouragement for the frightened wretch; now he made a sign as though renouncing him as a liar and abandoning him to his fate.

The examination continued. Digges had gone to the kitchen, had a drop of something hot, and at half-past eleven went round to the front of the house, and had just got his hand on the ladder to lift it, when to his surprise he found that it would not move, that there was *something on it*—in his alarm he shook it, and in the same moment heard just above him a shriek that made his flesh creep, that seemed to come from Mrs. Eyre's room. For a moment he could not move; the next he began to run up the ladder, but met *something*

coming down. He retreated backwards before it, and turning the bull's-eye of his lantern upon what was rushing on him, saw that it was Mrs. Clarke, Lord Lovel's lady. He was so confounded at the shriek, and at seeing her there, that he let her run past him; but, recovering himself, he seized hold of her skirt, only she fought like any cat, and got away, and he didn't run after her, for he wanted to know what was going on at the top of the ladder; he didn't think that screech was his missus's, she had got a very douce voice, but he wanted to see;—and here his grotesque contortions of face produced in the lookers-on a mingled cessation of laughter and horror, while Mr. Eyre's face grew harder, and Frank's a shade paler than it had been before.

His mistress was leaning back in a chair, with her back to the window, and his master was standing beside her, holding a handkerchief to her side that was stained with blood. Almost at the same moment the door flew open, and Lord Lovel, with Josephine behind him, rushed in; and before he had got his wits back, he was seized and dragged backwards, though why he could not be trusted to go down the ladder alone he did not know, as he had done nothing, and no doubt would be hanged for it, though he had never harmed his mistress in her life—he loved her a deal too well for that.

Here his evidence ended, and he was dragged out of court, bellowing like an ox, and firmly convinced

that, in spite of appearances, he was being led there and then to execution, while those who had thought it possible that the man had murdered his mistress for the sake of the diamonds, did not see how his simplicity had told more in his favour than a volume of evidence could have done against him.

All eyes now turned to the prisoner, who during the harangue for the prosecution had stood perfectly still, like a creature stunned by a sudden blow from which she has not been given time to recover, her beauty dulled, almost effaced by the heavy cloud that overshadowed it, so that the women wondered what Lord Lovel could have found to admire in this stupid-looking criminal.

Mr. Eyre looked at no one. Presently a ray of sunshine penetrated the court, and fixed his eye. 'Madcap is dead—dead——' he glanced round the court. How forcibly the scene reminded him of that other trial last spring—these women, with their opera-glasses; these gaping country folks, with their curiosity and their fear; the Judge, with his wig a little awry, the same one who had condemned Janet to death; while he himself, who had looked on as witness at a trial for the murder of his own child, now, in the same spot, looked on at that child's mother charged with the murder of his wife.

Sin ever has its inexorable consequences; but in this instance the fatality of the crime that, once committed, had remained attached to the chain of events

as a link of iron, was surely something to tremble at . . . . this dead sin with its train of awful consequences rising out of the forgotten past, to stand face to face with the living ignorant cause to-day, a thing to make a man fear lest even his thoughts of evil might not be unknown potentialities for crime impelling him to a frightful but inevitable consummation of which he had never dreamed.

Sarah Bodkin, maid to the late Mrs. Eyre, was then examined.

She said that she had dressed her mistress for dinner as usual that night; but Mr. Eyre having come in, and seen the diamonds open in their cases on the table, had requested her to wear them; and while she went to fetch the children, himself fastened the jewels in her hair, and on her neck and arms.

Her mistress had rung her bedroom bell at about a quarter to eleven, and she had unclasped the diamonds, and taken off her evening dress, but had not replaced the stones in their cases, as Mrs. Eyre had said she would do so herself presently, and meanwhile asked for a white wrapper, and sat down to read at a little distance from the window, which was open, the night being as mild as September.

Her mistress had wished her good-night as usual when she left the room, and seemed in good spirits—not so high, perhaps, as sometimes, for she was a very happy spirited lady; she would play about, and laugh just like a child, when nobody was looking (and here

the woman turned aside to weep bitterly), and witness had never thought that in less than an hour she would see her poor lady bleeding in that very chair.

She had heard the cry that aroused the whole house, and hurried with the other servants to the room, but never thought about the diamonds until Josephine had exclaimed that they were gone; and before witness could recover herself to look round in search for them, the appearance of the gardener at the window had diverted her attention; and though she afterwards made a careful examination of the room, she could not discover a trace of the precious stones.

After some cross-examination, in which no fresh evidence was elicited—

Josephine Eénouf was called. Her relation to the man Digges had attracted the popular attention, and her appearance fixed it, as, faultlessly attired for the character, and with that play of feature which in a Frenchwoman does duty for a blush, she commenced her evidence as follows:

She had been bidden at about half-past six o'clock on the night of the murder to take the children to her mistress, and had admired the diamonds with which her lady was decked, but had shortly taken the children back to the nursery, and after putting them to bed, had gone down to the kitchen to have a chat with her fellow servants, and fetch her supper. She was supposed to eat this in the nursery, but partook

of it below stairs that night, and afterwards joined in a game of cards in the servants' hall, the gardener coming in unexpectedly towards the end of it. They had fallen to talking of the diamonds, and she had said in joke that she would marry him (Digges) when he could give her as fine a necklace as the one her mistress was wearing that night, and being a stupid fellow, it had taken some time to explain to him what diamonds were, and how valuable. She had remained behind after Sarah Bodkin had answered her mistress's bell, and on returning to the nursery had been startled to find Lord Lovel there, for she knew that the butler had gone upstairs to shut up the house for the night, supposing him to be gone.

His lordship accounted for his appearance there by saying that he was certain he had seen Mrs. Clarke enter, but on assuring him that such was not the case, he had advanced to the inner room to search it, and was conversing with her on the subject of Master Dody's health, when the shriek was heard from the opposite wing that roused the house.

Witness then detailed the scene that had met her eyes when she had rushed to Mrs. Eyre's room, and in spite of a severe cross-examination, was firm in her denial that she had removed the diamonds in the confusion of the scene.

Cross-examined as to her intimacy with Hester Clarke, she admitted it, but added that her mistress knew of, and encouraged it, and had bade her let

Master Dody walk or play with the prisoner whenever they should meet her abroad. At these words, a look of agony was observed to cross the prisoner's features, her head sank lower, and the whole attitude of detected guilt became more marked.

Her examination continued, Josephine said that she had not been present when Mrs. Clarke had returned to the Red Hall. She had sat up the preceding night, and Lord Lovel had insisted on her going to bed ; and a sharp cross-examination elicited but little more from the Frenchwoman than the foregoing, and it was with an air of conscious innocence that she left the box to make room for the next witness, the doctor who had been fetched by Frank, and who had been with Mrs. Eyre till within an hour of her death.

He said that he had previously attended Mrs. Eyre in her illnesses, and was called up at about twelve o'clock on the night in question. He found her lying on the bed, pulseless, and apparently dead, her white wrapper deeply stained with blood, and on the left side, just below the heart, a small incised wound, likely to be produced by a narrow, long knife, such as the one now produced in court. By the aid of violent remedies he had produced some signs of life in her ; but she was practically dying when he first saw her, and would in all probability have succumbed to the fatal blow at once, were it not for the condition in which she was.

Cross-examined as to whether she had not actually died in child-birth, or of the violence of the remedies applied, he said that to live more than a few hours after such an injury was impossible; and when pressed as to whether the chloroform administered by Mr. Eyre had not been dangerous to her life, he replied that though possibly she might have been kept alive another hour or two by skilful management, nothing could have extended her life to the middle of the following day. Great force must have been used in making the blow, and it was impossible that she could have inflicted it on herself—everything pointed to its being struck while she was asleep, as Mr. Eyre's evidence, taken from her own lips, would presently show.

The next witness called was Lord Lovel. He was in deep mourning, and in this respect offered a marked contrast to Mr. Eyre, who, to the scandal of all present, was habited precisely as usual; while in Frank's haggard face grief showed more plainly than in Mr. Eyre's, who was but a shade darker and grimmer than his wont.

Yet there was neither fear nor shame in Frank's look, but something so noble that those who had suspected him felt their thoughts to be their own dishonour. He briefly gave his evidence, to the effect that he had dined at the Hall, spent the evening with Mr. and Mrs. Eyre, and, on the former retiring to the library, had stood for a short time by the open window with Mrs. Eyre, after which she had gone upstairs,

and he had waited for Mr. Eyre until close upon half-past eleven, when he had left the house; but seeing a figure flit across the open and disappear in the children's wing, and, suspecting harm, he had gone at once to the nursery, and finding the door ajar, entered.

Being asked what reason he had to suspect harm to any of the inmates of the Hall, Frank did not immediately reply. He was wondering how much was known of the real story, and whether it were bound to come out in the course of the trial . . . . he chose a middle course, and told a part of the truth.

He knew, he said, that the prisoner had a very strong affection for Mr. Eyre's younger child, and had suspected her of an inclination to steal it. It was for this reason that he had re-entered the house by way of the nurseries.

Asked if he thought the murder had been committed by the prisoner through jealousy caused by himself, he replied coldly that he did not consider himself obliged to answer that question.

He then corroborated Josephine's evidence, and described the circumstances under which he had accompanied her to Mrs. Eyre's bedroom.

Here his by no means interesting evidence ended but his cross-examination took longer, and was another matter.

'Lord Lovel was quite sure that there was nothing in his conversation with Mrs. Eyre to which her husband could object, if (according to the gardener's

evidence) Mr. Eyre was an unsuspected auditor of their conversation ?'

But Frank not choosing to reply to this question, it was not pressed, though one equally offensive was substituted.

'Lord Lovel did not think it likely that his host had purposely left them alone, that he might play the spy upon them ?'

Frank looked up, and his eyes meeting Mr. Eyre's, both men smiled, and none present could hence-forward doubt the perfect confidence that existed between them.

He answered, however, that as nothing was likely to be said in Mr. Eyre's absence that could not freely be said in his presence, there was no necessity what-ever for his host to listen at keyholes.

Frank was next asked if it were not a matter of public notoriety that some months since he had eloped with the deceased lady, and on her husband pardoning the escapade, witness had afterwards been received on his former friendly footing at the Red Hall ?

Frank replied haughtily that it had certainly been his privilege on one occasion to escort Mrs. Eyre on a morning ride from the White House to her own home, as she was desirous of seeing her children ; but he failed to see what bearing such a question could have on the case.

His proud, indignant looks, his shame for Madcap's sake, at hearing her. memory thus assailed, for the

moment touched the whole court into unison with his feelings, and his tormentor did not dare to further press the point, but commenced on a new tack.

'And you are able to swear on your oath that you were with Josephine Eénouf in the nursery when the scream was heard that brought the household to its mistress's bedroom?'

Frank looked at his interlocutor, and asked him where else he was likely to have been?

'You are prepared to swear that you did not, in collusion with the nurse, obtain access to Mrs. Eyre's room, and being surprised in it by her husband, the blow was struck that ended in her death?'

Frank's manhood was not proof against this last crowning insult to his dead saint . . . . his mouth quivered like that of a child, too hurt even to speak, and his head sank on his breast.

That her name should be thus bandied about in open day . . . . she . . . .

'You may commit me for contempt of court, if you please,' he said sternly, 'but I will not answer another question that you ask me on this subject.'

'I will change it, then, to one upon which I am compelled to question you—that of your relations with the accused. At the time of the murder she was residing in the village, nominally, as your mistress?'

'She was.'

'She felt and expressed great jealousy of Mrs. Eyre?'

'Never to my knowledge.'

'You do not think it likely that the murder was committed through jealousy on account of yourself?'

'I am sure that it was not.'

At the conclusion of the examination of this witness the court adjourned to ten o'clock on the following day, and after a word or two to his friends who rallied round him, Mr. Eyre rode homewards with Frank.

Not a syllable was exchanged between them, but when at a turn in the road they saw the distant lights shining in the Red Hall, Mr. Eyre dropped the reins on his horse's neck, and groaned aloud.

'And so we have lost her, Frank,' he said, 'and your house is cold—but not so cold as if she had made it warm, then gone away and left you to feel an iciness more bitter than that of the grave.' He wrung Frank's hand, then spurring his horse onward, was instantly gone.

'O wife! wife!' he said aloud, as he entered his own gates. 'Poor murdered Madcap,' and repeated over the lines—

'Since you noo mwore be at my zide
In walks, in zummer het,
I'll goo alwone where mist do ride,
Drough trees a-drippen wet;
Below the räin-wet bough, my love,
Where you did never come,
An' I don't grieve to miss ye now,
As I do grieve at hwhome.'

CHAPTER II.

'It is hard to personate and act a part long, for where truth is not at the bottom Nature will always be endeavouring to return, and will peep out, and betray herself one time or other.'

THE court resumed next morning, and was crowded in every part. At ten o'clock the prisoner was placed at the bar, and though still very pale, had lost much of that crushed appearance she had displayed the day before; and on Mr. Eyre's entering the witness-box, showed symptoms of almost uncontrollable agitation.

He himself gave no sign of emotion as he briefly gave his evidence, and even under the cross-examination betrayed none of the impatience and anger that Frank had done.

Asked if he had ever felt any jealousy of Lord Lovel, especially on that fatal night, he looked across at Frank, and involuntarily the two men smiled, thereby greatly scandalizing the jury, who could not see that the murder of a man's wife was a matter for joking to the man himself.

Asked if he had unlocked the door, seldom used, that connected the library with the drawing-room, and which on the latter side was hidden by a thick curtain, Mr. Eyre replied that from the moment of entering the library he had not once left his seat at the writing-table till he was roused from a doze into which he had fallen by a shriek that appeared to come from his wife's room, and that caused him im-

mediately to ascend the small staircase that communicated with her apartment.

On being reminded that the gardener swore to seeing him standing by the door on the other side of which Lord Lovel and his wife were conversing, while in confirmation of his assertion the door was next day found unlocked, Mr. Eyre replied indifferently that Digges must have seen double, and the servant herself had probably unlocked the door, for he knew nothing of it.

Cross-examined as to why he had bade the servants seize the gardener, he said that for the moment he did not recognise the man, and supposed the crime to have been committed for the sake of the diamonds.

'He was no longer of that opinion?'

'No; the murderer, or rather, murderess, was standing in the dock at that moment.'

If none present had seen Hester's eyes before, they saw them then, as with an indescribable gesture she flung her head back and looked at Mr. Eyre across the court. Many held their breath as the eyes of the accuser and the accused met, her lips parting as though forced asunder by the torrent of fire that strove to escape from them . . . . for a moment she looked a dangerous creature, an unknown quantity of evil that by its own force impressed itself physically on the understandings of those around her, appalling them with a sense of tragedy of which both cause and issue were unknown; then dragging her eyes from his

face, sat down, a death-like rigidity succeeding to the violent emotion that had convulsed her.

'You were so firmly convinced of the prisoner's guilt that you actually committed her to gaol on no other grounds than your own suspicions?'

'I did.'

'At that time you had not heard the man Digges' evidence of what had happened the night of the murder?'

'Not a syllable.'

'You knew of reasons why she was likely to have committed the murder?'

'I did.'

At this moment a subdued hubbub was heard outside the Court, and two constables entered, one of whom bore a sealed packet, that with certain whispered intelligence was immediately handed up to the Judge. The second constable led in Josephine, pale as death, with every sign of guilt written on her face.

A cry of 'The *diamonds!*' thrilled the court, as the judge broke the seal, and there fell out a glittering cascade of jewels on the notes that lay before him.

He lifted one in his hand, and as the light fell full on it, Mr. Eyre, who was extraordinarily long-sighted, leaned forward and looked at it intently.

'I have seen that jewel before,' he exclaimed, and requested that it might be handed to him, together with the rest.

He looked at without touching them, and when asked if he recognised them, replied:

'Certainly.'

'They belonged to your late wife?'

'No.'

'To whom, then?'

'To the prisoner.'

Asked if his acquaintance with her had been such as to justify his swearing to everyone of these jewels as her property, he replied that there was not a trinket there he had not purchased himself.

A thrill of excitement passed through the court as he spoke; but scarcely was time given to guess at what was coming, when he went on:

'I gave those gewgaws some seven years ago to the prisoner, who was then my mistress. That there may be no misapprehension in future on the subject, and the reason for her murder of my wife be better understood, I also declare myself to have been the father of the child for whose murder Janet Stork was tried in this court, and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, in May last.'

A dead silence succeeded this speech, as if those present were unable to take in its full significance; then Hester's counsel darted a quick, angry look at her, and made a gesture as if he threw up his brief.

The Judge looked for Lord Lovel, but, finding he had left the court, shook his head, and glanced coldly

at Mr. Eyre, who stood, with folded arms and indifferent eye, waiting till vulgar surprise and curiosity should exhaust itself, and permit justice to proceed. But lawyers are inured to surprises, and there was no very appreciable pause between his speech and the next question put to him—

'If the trinkets belonged to his former mistress, how did witness suppose they had come into the possession of his servant?'

'They had probably been used to bribe the woman,' Mr. Eyre said, with a look at Josephine, beneath which she trembled; and the evidence of the constable who had brought her being then gone into, it was proved that the jewels had that morning been found hidden beneath a plank in the nurse's room, and that she had exhibited such extraordinary fear on their discovery that a much closer examination was now being conducted, in the expectation of finding other hoards.

There suddenly flashed across Mr. Eyre's memory the cupidity of the woman's eyes on the night she had seen her mistress dressed in the diamonds, and he glanced at her keenly, but in the same moment put the thought by—he was so convinced of the guilt of the woman who stood in the dock before him.

Cross-examined as to his reasons for practising such a deception, and asked if he considered it the act of a man of honour to allow his friend to be publicly accredited with his sin, Mr. Eyre replied, carelessly, that

it was no question of his honour, but of his wife's happiness, which, thank God! and in spite of the manner of her end, had been preserved to the last.

There were those present who believed they saw Satan in the flesh, as they gazed at this man, in whom was no ruth or pity; who could own himself to their eyes a man who had not scrupled to sacrifice his friend's honour to his own well-being, and who now deliberately pursued to the death a woman whose crime, if she had committed one, distinctly lay at his door.

But there was one present who loved him better in his ruin than she had ever loved him in his honour, though he was not even conscious of her gaze, looking on all that passed around him as figures in a kaleidoscope, with which himself and his inward thoughts had nothing to do.

Asked if he thought that jealousy of his wife was likely to have precipitated the prisoner into the crime, Mr. Eyre replied that he considered the motive a mixed one—intense jealousy of Mrs. Eyre being subordinated to the woman's rooted determination to punish him through his wife.

He then detailed his conversation with her on the afternoon preceding the murder, and this produced a marked effect on the jury, who, since Mr. Eyre's bold avowal of the truth, had felt some relentings towards the prisoner. There was little more to be added, and when he left the witness-box Josephine entered it,

and, at considerable length, was cross-examined as to how the trinkets had come into her possession.

She had by now regained a large portion of her self-command, and answered without hesitation all questions put to her, though every word she spoke deepened the popular impression against the prisoner at the bar.

She said, that not satisfied with seeing the children out of doors by Mrs. Eyre's permission, prisoner had endeavoured to gain access to the house at night and other times, and to this witness had demurred, knowing that if it came to Mr. Eyre's ears she would lose her situation. But by degrees she had permitted herself to be bribed, first by one trinket, then another, till at last prisoner had come and gone at the house pretty well as she liked. (A model of the house here produced showed that the nursery was reached easily from the garden, the iron steps being screened from sight of the opposite wing by the thick shrubs that grew around it.) Witness knew that latterly prisoner had shown great bitterness of feeling towards Mrs. Eyre, and had dropped hints of punishing her for being so happy, before long.

This part of the evidence was only elicited with great difficulty, and it was observed that witness held her eyes studiously averted from those of the prisoner in the dock.

She had not reflected that payment of some sort would be required for these trinkets, whose value

might be roughly estimated at some hundreds of pounds, and would swear that she had never by word nor deed been accessory to the murder of her mistress.

At the close of the cross-examination of this witness, the court adjourned for luncheon, and Mr. Eyre saved his fellow magistrates the awkwardness of meeting him by going at once to a particular inn hard by, where, as he had expected, he found Lord Lovel.

'And so you're cleared, Frank,' he said, laying his hand on the bright head sunk in the young fellow's arms; 'and now I can walk erect, and fear no man—morally, I've been going two-double these six months.'

'Why did you tell them?' said Frank, lifting a haggard face; 'there was no need.'

'Was there not?' said Mr. Eyre, looking at the young man with strange gentleness. 'I think so, and it will make another link in the chain of evidence that will hang the woman.'

'Did she commit the crime?' exclaimed Frank involuntarily; 'the evidence is circumstantial enough—and yet—I think Digges was dismissed too soon—or what if Josephine committed the murder after all?' said Frank.

'No,' said Mr. Eyre; 'she has the courage to steal, but not to murder. Strange,' he went on, 'the look that other woman gave me when I denounced her as the murderess—her ungovernable emotion, checked at its very height, petrified, as by a cold blast of reflection—it reminded me of Etna's molten lava, that,

sweeping over the head of the valley in a river of fire, falls at the foot of the precipice in masses of solid rock —there's something inconceivably horrid in the sound of the crags striking against the bottom,' added Mr. Eyre absently.

'That sudden calm was unnatural,' said Frank. 'What could it have been that she forced herself not to speak? I begin to doubt——'

'Doubt nothing,' said Mr. Eyre; 'there's proof enough in the fragment of torn clothing—the blood-stained knife,' exclaimed Mr. Eyre; adding abruptly, 'It is curious, but I could have sworn I had seen and handled that knife before, and it corresponds exactly to that stain in the drawer;' he passed his hand across his brow, as though to dismiss some haunting thought, then said, 'but you'll come back with me into court? You've been a hero too long to mind folks knowing it.'

'I'd rather go a thousand miles,' cried Frank; 'and the moment all this is over I shall leave the place for years. I can't be any use to you now.'

'And so you never had a kind feeling for me on my own account,' said Mr. Eyre; then checked himself, and added grimly, 'I wonder what they are saying about me over there? Think of Busby's triumph! What a fall, Frank—but, thank God, it's nothing since *she's* not here to see it! The afternoon will be a long one, but I think to-morrow will see the end; and then —and then——'

'What then?' said Frank, struck by a something in Mr. Eyre's tone.

'Then I shall rest. And you'll go away and forget; you are only a boy yet. But I must be gone; I have an interview to get over, and she shall have every chance. Don't laugh when her counsel makes his speech for the defence. And it doesn't matter—pure souls in heaven aren't plagued with shorthand notes of a *cause célèbre*.'

'I'll go with you,' cried Frank, starting up, as he thought of Madcap, and of how she would have scorned him, had he permitted her beloved to go forth alone to face his enemies.

'Will you?' said Mr. Eyre, looking at him earnestly. 'Well, then, I accept the sacrifice. I wish them to see what a man *might* be, side by side with what he *is*.'

And so, when the court reassembled an hour later, the two men entered it together.

CHAPTER III.

'I would be High, but see the proudest oak
Most subject to the rending thunderstroke.'

'I would be Wise, but that I often see
The fox suspended while the ass goes free.'

MR. EYRE'S character, discussed by his friends at luncheon, had suffered severely. Inhuman, dishonourable, lying—these had been some of the epithets

applied to his conduct, and even the Duke had not been able to stem the current of popular opinion against him. It was taken for granted that he had from the first known the child drowned in the Shifting Pool to be his own, and pushed the charge against the woman, Janet Stork, with relentless vigour, till the accident of the mother's appearance in the place had compelled him to a dishonourable policy, in which, by private agreement with Lord Lovel, he had made the young man the scapegoat of his sin. The power of his influence over his discarded mistress was gauged by the fact, that though residing in the village for nearly seven months, she had never even sought to discover herself to the wife, but had shared with Lord Lovel the false position in which Mr. Eyre's hypocrisy had placed her.

In the minds of the jury this latter consideration was destined to bear unexpected results, while at the same time a stormy interview was going forward between the prisoner and the counsel that Mr. Eyre had engaged on her behalf.

It had been incomparably more brilliant than his own, for he had characteristically said that, being guilty, she should have the best advice, and so had secured in her service one of the finest criminal pleaders of the day.

It had been only by the most urgent questioning that her counsel had been able to extract a single fact upon which to base her defence; but when in the

teeth of the morning's evidence she still refused to furnish him with any information, he more than half felt himself justified in abandoning her to her fate. For this was a case upon which the eyes of the civilized world were fixed, and to bring her safely through would be a triumph that he might not easily forego.

But his utmost stress of urgency could elicit from her no account of the events on the night of the murder. From the time she had left her lodging in Synge Lane, at eleven o'clock, to the moment when she was arrested with the body of the child in her arms, all was a blank.

In vain her counsel declared that the penalty of her silence must infallibly be death at the gallows: she was indifferent to the prospect; she saw beyond it Dody's welcome, and his mother's kiss, as she said, 'I misunderstood you once, but *now* I understand . . . .' and the utmost confession he could wring from her was to the effect that when she had come to Lovel in search of her servant, Janet Stork, she had no conception that it was the dwelling-place of her child's father.

Against Mr. Eyre she would say nothing, but there was a determined reticence in her manner that spoke of reserves of knowledge to which her questioner was not admitted, and it was with a conviction that in his speech for the defence he must draw on imagination rather than facts that he left her. Hester sat for awhile alone after her adviser had left her, and looked

around, fixed, like Janet, in the resolve to die, should justice command it.

As she sat with her head on her arms, thinking of that beyond in which her own child and his brother might perchance come to meet her, approaching footsteps warned her that it was time to ascend to the dock above.

Entering the court with that softened look still on her face, she produced a more favourable effect on the public than she had yet done; while Mr. Eyre, perhaps by contrast with Frank, had a harsh, repellent air that denied sympathy, and made him look to the life the character assigned to him by his deeds.

A murmur of admiration was audible when Frank entered—for in the eyes of many that one lie of his was sufficient to efface any past sins that he had committed, and open to him the gates of Paradise—but at sound of it he coloured deeply, and felt the impulse to turn back, but he would not leave Mr. Eyre, and for the remainder of that day, and all the next, stood beside him.

Some minor evidence, including that of prisoner's landlady, who swore to her having left the cottage in Synge Lane at about ten o'clock on the night of the murder, and that she never again returned there, closed the case for the prosecution; and, amid a breathless silence, and in a court packed to suffocation, the counsel for the defence rose to address the jury on behalf of the prisoner.

CHAPTER IV.

'Life is sweet.'

'MY LORD, and gentlemen of the jury,' he said, 'in the whole course of my experience of the criminal courts of this country, I have never risen to address a jury under more painful feelings, or with greater anxiety, than upon this occasion. There are circumstances in the case that, even as they were developed before the magistrates, to cause me much anxiety; and such being the case, how much more must that anxiety be increased by the production of this morning's most unexpected evidence, by which the unhappy woman at the bar may be placed in the greatest peril and most awful jeopardy. Gentlemen, I have not merely to deal with the facts of this case, as they appear in evidence, but I have to contend against the prejudices that have been born of the peculiar circumstances by which this case is surrounded—circumstances intensified tenfold by the extraordinary revelations made in court this day. When I gaze around me, and see the numbers that fill this court, feeling with them the thrill of indignation at the dastardly crime committed; when I turn to the prisoner—a stranger, without a living soul to stand by her in her distress—lonely, deserted, to all seeming abandoned by God and man—my spirit sinks at the magnitude of the task I have taken upon me. Nevertheless, relying on

the noble independence of a British jury—on its strict integrity, on its sense of justice—I have no fear of such a tribunal, and know that the whole case will be fully, fairly, and impartially considered by you.

'Having made these observations, I shall now proceed to consider the most unparalleled circumstances of this painful case.

'In the first place, I would answer the question of the learned counsel for the prosecution, as to who could possibly have had a motive for the murder, unless it had been the prisoner?

'That someone had a motive for compassing that poor young lady's death I will presently be prepared to show; but that person was not the prisoner. And before attempting to refute the evidence against her, I will tell the story of her life—in itself a more complete refutation than any other that could be afforded.

'Some eight years ago, when young and very beautiful, the prisoner had become attached to Mr. Eyre, and for a while was happy, believing herself secure of his affections; but at last he fell in love with a young girl of less than half his age, who, ignorant of his long-standing connection with the accused, loved him in return. Her friends, who knew his story, forbade the marriage, the more so as she had previously become engaged to Lord Lovel, who was nearly of her own age, and most deeply attached to her; but a few days before that fixed for her

wedding with him, she contrived to elope with Mr. Eyre, and was married to him before they could be overtaken.

'Meanwhile, what does this woman do, who is left alone, loving the man who has abandoned her as passionately as he once loved herself, and with a secret to bear of which he had not dreamt? He had provided for her, he had done all that honour demanded, if less than love asked; and doubtless the world would have blamed her had she pursued him into the presence of his new and happier love; but she made no such outcry over her loss. She did not declare that, since love was denied her, vengeance should be hers; but lived alone, unfriended, until just before her child was born, when she sent for her foster-sister, who came. But so careful was she that no shadow of her misery and degradation should pass between Mr. Eyre and his happiness, that she would not even reveal to her foster-sister his name—the foster-sister, who was the one person on earth who loved this forsaken, unhappy woman, and who attended her devotedly throughout that terrible time. But this woman, with the stern instinct of revenge common to her class, took the resolve to confront the father with his child, and rouse him from the dream of happiness in which he was sunk to contemplate the misery of the woman whom he had once loved. And by patient watching and searching, she at length obtained what she believed to be a clue to his home and name; then

persuading the mother that the child would be better if taken to her own people for a while, and the mother consenting, the servant took it away; and that way led her to the very gates of Mr. Eyre, the man through whose instrumentality the woman he had once loved stands charged with murder as a felon in the dock to-day.

'But placed on a false scent by the information that she had gathered in the village, and faint with fasting and fatigue, the servant repented of her plan, and creeping away, sat down to rest herself by the pool, of whose curious history she was ignorant. As night drew on, the child cried for food, but she had none to give it, and in a moment of madness laid the baby down by the pool and walked away, thinking that some one would find it, but returned a few moments later to find that it had rolled itself over the brink, and disappeared.

'She sat there all that night—God knows what agonies that woman endured through those awful hours; but when day broke, she crept away homewards, and after walking an incredible distance, enduring all sorts of hardships, she reached her foster-sister, who, running to her with outstretched arms to seize the child, was met with the one single word —dead!

'For alas! the mother's heart, to all appearance so indifferent, had awakened in her during the servant's absence and only when she knew that her baby was

dead—had died of diphtheria on his way home—did she fully realize the happiness that might have been hers had she kept him beside her. When her servant conducted her to a supposititious grave, she fell down beside it insensible, and for days and weeks was incapable of movement or thought ; but when she came to herself, a fixed monomania possessed her—to discover in the ranks of the living such a child as her own might have been, had he lived. But nowhere could she find such an one, though she sought him far and wide.

'Think of the horror of the situation—of the servant knowing herself to be in deed, if not in heart, a murderess—think of these two lonely women dwelling with that awful secret between them for years and years, till one morning, in the corner of a country newspaper, the servant read how by the drying up of the Shifting Pool in the village of Lovel, the skeleton of a very young child had been discovered, proved by medical evidence to have lain there upwards of five years.

'An awful fear seized her lest the mother should hear of the discovery, and drawn by a dreadful fascination to the spot, she gathered a little money together, and without a word to her mistress, walked every step of the way to Lovel.

'When she reached the fatal pool, the place was deserted, but as she sat there in a state of stupor, born of inanition and despair, a labourer passed, and

she recognised his face at once, as he recognised hers. He had spoken to her five years before, when she had sat by the pool with the baby on her knee.

'As he stared at her, open-mouthed, Mr. Eyre rode up, and, hearing the man's stammering exclamations, drew the truth from him, and, without a moment's hesitation, as magistrate, committed the woman to prison. She did not know him either by sight or name, nor did she bear him any malice—her one hope was that her mistress might be prevented from knowing the truth, and so she gave a false name, and pleaded guilty, only anxious that she might die before Hester Clarke, by chance, should hear of the trial, and, suspecting who the prisoner might be, come in search of her.

'She was found guilty in due course; but the description of her person in the papers, coupled with the fact of her sudden disappearance, excited her mistress's suspicions, and she set out at once, reaching the prison the day after sentence had been passed upon her foster-sister.

'Of that terrible meeting between the two women, when the mother knew herself to have been robbed of all that had made life dear, by the hand of the only creature on earth who had loved her, I will not speak. Let us rather study the conduct of the accused afterwards, and see if she displays that revengeful, cruel disposition, which could alone account for the murder she was afterwards supposed to commit.

'Does she thrust her unhappy servant from her—does she leave her alone face to face with the horrors of the fate to which she is sentenced? Does she tell into the many eager ears around her, the truth about the man who lives honoured and respected with her rival, up at the house yonder?

'No! she remains with this poor wretch—she soothes her in those last days, so rapidly approaching their frightful end—she confesses that *she* is the mother, thereby hoping to divert to her own head some of her servant's guilt—she moves heaven and earth to obtain a reprieve, and, failing that, a remission of the sentence to one of penal servitude for life; and when at length the respite comes—a respite delayed to the last moment, because the efforts of Mr. Eyre against it have well-nigh succeeded—she receives the merciful intelligence with her arms clasped about the unhappy woman who has consummated her misery.

'Then, when the poor felon had departed to expiate *his* sin in a living death more awful than utter extinction, bereft of her last, her only hope, what shall this poor stranger do? She has but to open her lips, to blare aloud a few pregnant words, and all will shrink away from the man whom now they delight to honour, the young wife's happiness will be withered, the young children's opening lives overshadowed, *his* peace as utterly broken as *her* happiness was by him half a dozen years ago. By accident she finds herself in the presence of the wife, but does not speak, though Lord

Lovel (who has long known the truth), believing her about to do so, interposes, and takes upon himself the guilt belonging to her husband, and in this transparent fiction the woman before you quietly acquiesced, and stood dumbly by to see her rival honoured, left in the possession of husband, home, and children ; while *she*, poor outcast, despised by man, if not by God, stood at his gates, hungering for the crumbs of bread that fell from the rich man's table.

'How much native goodness, how much nobility of soul, did she not display in thus permitting the happiness to continue that she could wither at a word! She lingers, and lingers yet ; and why ? A beautiful little child, such a child as hers might have been had he lived—the child of the man she loved—crosses her path ; she trembles, and is subjugated ; she clasps him to her bosom, and loves him as well as a better woman might have done, as passionately as if he had been her own little living lad ; and one by one parts with her cherished jewels, gifts of the man who once loved her, that by conciliating his nurse she may enjoy the child's company. And the little one loved her ; he knew not the wrongs that his father had committed against her, and for a little while we may suppose this poor tortured heart had found peace at last, and that love had cast out the bitterness she had been more than human did she not feel. But long ere this, her betrayer knows her presence, trembles at her power, and offers her golden bribes to

leave him unmolested in his Eden; but she has no power to move; she is chained to the spot by her love for his child; her soul is wrapped up in him, so that she will see him by stealth, creeping out of sight like a thing accursed when the wife, in all the panoply of her pride and happiness, passes by, and so remains silent—silent always to the very end! It is not on her soul that she has stolen one moment from the five years of unrivalled happiness that fell to Mrs. Eyre's lot; suspicion never dimmed, anxiety never bowed for a moment that radiant spirit now departed, which lived and died happy, though there dwelt at her very side what could have made her the most wretched of created beings by the utterance of a few words. Even her death was happy in its suddenness; how much more happy than the agonizing death in life of that other, who had gone through every bitter phase of disillusionment and heartbreak before she had reached the crowning misery of her position in the court that day!

'But this death of her happy rival, how was it compassed, by whom carried out? Could anyone for a moment believe that it was conceived and executed by a woman whose scheme from the first moment, and even in the agonies of a bereavement that might have set at defiance all dictates of policy, had been that of moderation and forbearance?

'Her presence at the Red Hall on the night of the murder was to be accounted for on purely natural

grounds. By the nurse's own confession, these unauthorized visits had been connived at, even purchased, by the hoarded jewels that one by one the accused had parted with to secure her favour, and that midnight call was only one out of a hundred others in which no special motive was likely to lurk.

'I will offer my own explanation of that night's work, based partly on fact, and partly on the foregoing events that, in the common order of things, would lead to certain results.'

(It was here observed that the prisoner, who had hitherto regarded him restlessly, and much as a clairvoyant, who speaks but her inmost secrets, here sprang up and spread out her hands with a gesture as of repudiation.)

'On that night, then, she had left her lodging to take a good-night kiss of her darling in his bed, certain that at this hour Mrs. Eyre would have retired to rest, and the master of the house be engaged below on those studies that had lately absorbed him. For she knew, as no other did, that her idol had for months past been growing more and more delicate; that which the mother's eye had failed to perceive, the poor outcast saw quickly enough; and so she was stealing, in darkness and secrecy, to know him safe; when, unfortunately, Lord Lovel, just then leaving the house, caught sight of her vanishing figure, and, impelled by some instinct of fear, followed.

'He discovered nothing; for, with that sense of

shame at her own position that had throughout distinguished her, she had slipped behind an open door, and only on the disappearance of her pursuer into an inner room, noiselessly kissed her darling, and made her escape.

'Gentlemen, how shall I now venture to approach a subject that, while seeming far-fetched, is literally true to nature? When she ran out and down the stone steps that led to the garden, a brightly shining light on the opposite wing attracted her attention, and looking wistfully at that little beacon which indicated so much, insensibly she drew nearer till her foot struck against a ladder placed against a wall beneath it. A sudden impulse—mad, foolish, if you will, but natural—bade her ascend it, and look in unsuspected for a moment on the happy rival who rested securely within, with peaceful heart, happy in all this poor creature lacked, but in which, long ago, she had, perhaps, fondly hoped to be rich.

'With what fear and trembling does she mount step by step; how cautiously, when she has reached the topmost rung, does she raise her head to look in. But what is this! I will tell you what she sees. Though, faithful to her noble policy to the last, she will not speak in her own defence, I say that she sees——'

(Here the prisoner started up in wild excitement, and cried out passionately: 'I saw nothing—he can't know—I never told him a word!')

'She sees,' resumed her counsel, who had admirably

maintained his force during the interruption, 'no happy rival, but a woman in whose breast is at that moment being plunged the knife of the assassin : and forgetful of danger to herself, she forces her way through the window to clutch the knife from his hand, but he stabs at her violently ; then, when she has wrested it from him, he escapes, and she is left alone with the proof of murder in her hand.

'As she gazes at the bleeding, unconscious victim, a sudden sense of her own awful danger assails her ; she does not pause to summon help, but hiding the knife in her pocket, she forces herself through the aperture of the window, leaving behind her the scrap of torn clothing to which so much importance has been attached.

'Half crazed by the shock that the gardener's unsuspected presence at the foot of the ladder communicates to her; appalled by the hideous knowledge that she carries in her breast; in a panic of utterly unreasoning fear she rushes away — on and on—the dreadful scene ever before her—all that night and part of the next day; penniless, starving, hounded from every house as a common vagrant, till on the second day common sense returned to her.

'She thought of her darling, and of how lonely and wretched he must be with none to soothe him in his loss, and only hirelings to guard him from mischief; and painfully dragged herself back to the Red Hall,

only to find that her idolized little lad lay at the point of death, waited upon by Lord Lovel, who had fondly loved him.

'"*I* have loved him best!" she cried; "give him to *me!*" And at daybreak the child died in her arms, stretching out his hands to her, and thinking she was his mother. As she sate, stony and numbed, with the dead child across her knees, Mr. Eyre entered with the officers of the law, and bade them seize her for the murder of his wife.

'When they dragged her away she made no resistance; it was only her body that they took—her heart remained behind with the older image of her drowned child; nor even in that desperate moment, when face to face with her accuser, did she upbraid or denounce him, and in gaol she would not answer a single question as to what passed on the night of the murder; his own instructions, as counsel for her defence, being derived from other lips, since she would not open her own to defend herself.'

(A curious expression, almost amounting to a grimace, was observed to flit across Mr. Eyre's features at this speech; but Frank looked down, feeling as though he had betrayed his friend.)

'And now I have to ask you, if it is probable that the accused, if guilty, would have uttered a cry to rouse the whole household, and so bring it to seize her red-handed? Or, having escaped by a hair's-breadth, have boldly returned two days later to the

very scene of the murder, knowing that her flight had attracted public attention?

'That flight, the most damning proof of all against her, was simply the effect of panic—the unreasoning, headlong panic that will impel even a strong man to run away from the sight of a shocking deed—a panic from which, once recovered, she made her way back to the very spot that she would have shunned, like the plague, had she been a guilty woman!

'I say that she did not commit the murder; that the whole tenour of her life and character—merciful and humane—forbids the thought; but that her policy throughout has been to shield the real murderer, one who is even here present—a man who, in a moment of mad jealousy against his friend, slew the woman he loved, and strove to cast the guilt on the woman who loved him. I say, gentlemen of the jury, that I demand the acquittal of this woman, on the ground that the charge against her is not proved; and in her place, and in the interests of justice, to place at the bar the real murderer, who had a motive for the crime that the prisoner had not.'

(The judge frowned; the jury, unused to romance-reading, gaped; the opposing counsel smiled; through the Court a rustle, as of a light wind among autumn leaves, ran, and none looked at the prisoner, who was struggling for breath, and gazing at her advocate as if she could have slain him, but at Mr. Eyre, who was calm with the strength in which there is no effort, the

wild insinuation seeming to recoil on the speaker like a wave dashed backwards from a granite cliff. The next moment Hester's champion had regained his courage, and pressed onward before there was time to receive the reprimand he expected.)

'It had been said that there was a motive for the crime, and this motive had been declared to be jealousy; and this was true enough. The murder *had* been committed through that ignoble passion, but not by the prisoner.

'It would be necessary to remind the jury of those facts that had long been public talk—the ruptured engagement of the deceased lady with Lord Lovel, her intimacy with him on his return, her well-known elopement with him from the White House, and Mr. Eyre's pursuit of the runaway couple, overtaking them before they had gone any farther than Lovel. He had, at the time, affected to treat the matter as a joke, and had bid Lord Lovel to his house as usual; but it was observed by many that a great change was perceptible in him from that time, and he even neglected those magisterial duties that he had formerly fulfilled so ably, to all appearance disliking to meet his equals. Mr. Eyre was a very proud man—one who made laws, but was not governed by them—and it was only natural to suppose that, as time went on, and he found his young wife less and less a companion to him, he should become jealous of the brilliant young man who, in looks, age, and spirits,

was so much more a fitting mate for her than himself.

'On the night of the murder, it was clear that he had left the two together, then placed himself where he could be an auditor of all that passed; and, by a most unfortunate mischance, it occurred that they were conversing in a way that to the gardener sounded like "courting," and to him may have had a more sinister significance, as he reseated himself at his table, his head resting on his outstretched arms in the attitude in which Lord Lovel had seen him when he looked through the window.

'It was to be conjectured that, stung to a jealous madness—a second Othello in his jealousy, as she a Desdemona in her innocence—*some one* had ascended to Mrs. Eyre's apartment, and struck at her the blow that was her death.

'It would be found entirely consistent with the prisoner's former conduct that, while accidentally present at the deed—nay, while she even struggled to avert it—she should be bent on hiding the fact from every living soul, and escape hurriedly before there could be a chance of her being called upon to relate what she had seen. The shriek that escaped her, had been at the horrible sensation she experienced on feeling the presence of some person at the foot of the ladder; and if she had fought wildly, it had not been for fear on her own account, but on that of another person. The evidence of the man Digges as to the

precise moment in which he heard the scream was confused, and not to be trusted, his potations in the kitchen having muddled his wits, so that he was not able to swear if the cry preceded, or followed, his grip of the ladder.

'And now to examine the evidence that had been offered of her wish to steal the child of the deceased; could a more improbable time possibly have been selected than that of nigh upon midnight; and in what way could the mother, retired to rest in the opposite wing, have hindered that plan, or interfered with it? She had unrestricted access to him, could have carried him away at any hour of the day she willed; and it was inconceivable that she should have chosen this hour of the night to drag from his warm bed the little lad that she so passionately loved.

'There are motives of jealousy which instigate men and women to the commission of murder, of hatred and revenge, of avarice and plunder, that may spur them on to deeds of wickedness; but, as to the prisoner, what motive of hatred had she to Mrs. Eyre? By her successful rival's death she gained nothing—the ashes upon a stone-cold hearth were not colder than the heart of the man who had made her his toy, and crushed her under foot. The child's love was already hers, and should she forfeit that by a deed foreign to every natural trait that she had hitherto shown? The idea was preposterous, when all her antecedents had gone to prove that she regarded

with love and pity the woman who had supplanted her!'

'That is true'—and a woman's voice rang through the Court—'I loved her, and she loved me; the very day she died, she kissed me . . . .'

It was from the prisoner at the bar that those few passionate words came; and the judge, eyeing the jury carefully, knew that an effect had been produced on them that it would be difficult to undo.

Mr. Eyre started violently at Hester's words, then shook his head, and stood a statue of incredulity that tempered the excitement of those who glanced at him; he was in himself so impregnable, that these words floating about him were light as wind.

But when Nature speaks, man stops to hearken; and her simplest words are truth, while his utmost arguments are sophistries.

'Gentlemen of the jury,' cried Hester's counsel, seizing his golden opportunity, 'I leave this sorely tried, helpless woman in your hands, certain that you will show justice, and, if you have human hearts in your breasts, mercy towards one who has been most inhumanly treated. To you it is given to quench for ever the light of this noble soul, or to permit her a little space of existence upon earth, in which to repent the one thoughtless sin of her youth. As fathers, brothers, husbands, your every chivalrous instinct must be roused on behalf of this woman, who has been pursued by so immoderate a hatred on the part of the

man to whom she has sacrificed herself so splendidly; and if her reticence from one look or word that could criminate him does not stir you to that admiration and sympathy that a noble deed, finely persisted in, must evoke from every heart, then you are not fitted to judge of the rapidly moving drama of passions that this extraordinary case has revealed.

'Gentlemen,—mine has been a hazardous and awful task, but one far more awful lies before you, for upon its issue hangs that which may either haunt you to the remainder of your life, thrusting itself between you and the faces of your fellow-men, and condemning you before the judgment-seat of God, in that you have lightly destroyed a human soul; or your conviction of the innocence of the woman before you will find tongue in a verdict that, in your dying hours, will return to you as a memory that shall smooth the path which leads you to your Maker!'

CHAPTER V.

'O Heaven! it is mysterious, it is awful to consider, that we not only carry each a future ghost within him, but are in very deed, ghosts!'

DARKNESS had crept over the court before Mr. Valentine had ceased to speak; the scarlet canopy above the judge's head had turned black, and even the ladies' bonnets were swallowed up in the gloom.

The officials had neglected to bring lights, and it was impossible to perceive what effect this speech, that traversed all rules of legal etiquette, had produced on prisoner, judge, and jury.

Suddenly, almost in the moment of his voice ceasing, and before even a hum of exclamation could arise from the body of the court, a hubbub without spoke of some new excitement in connection with the trial; and a moment later, preceded by an usher who bore lights, a man—ragged, unshorn, and reckless-looking—entered the court.

He did not wait to be addressed, but boldly said that he had come to give important evidence about the murder, and the sooner he was sworn the better.

His appearance was the finishing stroke to the day's surprises, and even the judge, who had been in a state of moral shock ever since Mr. Eyre's self-denouncement, leaned forward to look earnestly at the man.

Duly sworn, he gave his evidence as follows:

He was a tramp, and could neither read nor write. Did not often trouble himself about other folks' business, though often enough they troubled themselves about his. On the whole, he thought he would rather be in gaol than out of it—leastways in winter time, when there were no fresh buds and things to smell at, and make a man forget his stomach.

He had been on the tramp now for three weeks, but two days ago, when at forty miles distance from Lovel, he had heard some gipsies talking about a

murder that had been committed at that place on a certain night, and how a woman had been arrested on suspicion of it. That made him think of something he had seen on passing through the village that very night, and it went against his conscience to let a woman be hanged for what she hadn't done—tramps had got consciences sometimes—there was no tax yet on that commodity, or maybe he couldn't afford the luxury. Well, he had tramped all the way back, and hoped he'd come in time. It seemed a largish sort of company to be got together to try and hang one woman.

Brought sharply back to the evidence he had volunteered, he deposed to the following :

Late in the afternoon preceding the murder he had passed through the village of Lovel, and between five and six, having begged unsuccessfully at half a dozen doors, he struck out across Synge Lane, for a house he knew of, where the servants would give him a crust of bread and a drink of beer.

But a bright light shining from a cottage attracted his attention, and he drew near the window, meaning to look in, when it gave him a turn to see close beside him a man who held a pistol pointed at something, or somebody, inside the room. He got behind him and looked in. A woman—a real beauty—was sitting just inside, and seemed to have dropped asleep in her chair ; she had on something loose and white, and looked as happy as a new-born babe.

He was just lifting his hand to knock the pistol from the man's hand, when the latter dropped it by his side, and without looking round or perceiving him, moved away.

He didn't follow—where was the good? Thought it was a bit of jealousy belike, and it's ill work meddling between a man and his woman.

Thought no more of it till the gipsies said a woman had been murdered that night at Lovel, and blamed himself for not having run after the man who had been practising-like, as it seemed, when witness saw him, but later on had come back, and actually killed her.

The tramp's face was a study of amazement and disbelief when he was told that no murder was committed in Synge Lane that night, and that the woman he had seen threatened stood in the dock before him on the charge of having murdered the mistress of the Red Hall, over a mile distant.

The tramp stared stupidly, then exclaimed that it was 'mortal queer.' For his own part, he shouldn't wonder if the man he'd seen practising at murder hadn't gone up to the Hall, and done it in sober earnest—one woman being very like another, and having once got his hand in, perhaps, he wasn't particular as to his game, so long as he brought down something.

Asked if he thought he could recognise the man again, and requested to glance round the court in

search of him (for by now it was fairly lit), the tramp's gaze wandered vaguely over the sea of faces, and he shook his head. He was sorry he had come back, he said—he had done no good—and in future he would let his conscience slide, for it brought him more plague than profit.

At the conclusion of his evidence, the court adjourned until the following day at ten o'clock, and rapidly emptied, the prevailing impression of astonishment being too keen to permit of more than mere broken exclamations. Not even by the following morning would the revelations of that day be fully digested.

As Mr. Eyre left the court, he came face to face with the tramp, who lingered, scanning the features of those who came out.

'Have you ever seen me before, my man?' said Mr. Eyre, who stood in a strong light.

The tramp looked hard at him, then away.

'I couldn't see his face,' he said sullenly; 'but you're about his height. But what was her that's murdered, to you?'

'My wife.'

The man lifted his shoulders suddenly—he had got a clue. Over-much love, or over-much hate, these were the causes of half the murders upon earth, especially between husbands and wives.

As Mr. Eyre passed on, some one behind leaned forward, and whispered in the tramp's ear.

CHAPTER VI.

'How did Hester Clarke's counsel get all that extraordinary evidence together in her favour?' exclaimed Frank, when with Mr. Eyre they stood waiting for the horses without.

'Oh! I told him,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly. 'When I left you at the inn, I caught him in the very nick of time, and told him every circumstance, including all you'd told *me*—everything that I could remember, to damn myself, and clear *her*. In short, I coached him, laid stress on myself as a villain; not that there is a chance of saving her, but she shall have fair play. And, upon my word, the defence was ingenious; that attempt to fix the murder on me was an inspiration that deserves success.'

But Frank shook his head; he felt that the popular indignation was violently excited against Mr. Eyre, and by no means felt sure of the issue of the morrow.

'Strange that I did not see the man in Synge Lane that night,' said Mr. Eyre abruptly, as they rode away; 'for I *did* think of killing the woman. The demon of murder *was* abroad that night; but it slew the innocent, not the guilty.'

Frank, plunged deep into a tragedy at war with his whole nature, remained silent. There seemed no light anywhere, and he had a dreadful consciousness of something unexplored—terrible—in Mr. Eyre's breast, that forbade confidence.

The two parted, as usual, at the gates of the Towers; but Mr. Eyre did not on this occasion immediately climb the steep path that led to the Hall; he turned aside, and sought the churchyard, in which all that was best in him lay.

He tethered his horse without, and entered it in the murky darkness of a chill November night, and finding his way by instinct to that narrow dwelling-place of her body, he kneeled down beside it.

As he stretched out his arms to the cold sod, they met some human substance that made him recoil.

But the next moment he advanced, and seized something that struggled out of his grasp, crying passionately:

'She isn't yours; she's *mine!*'

It was Doune's voice that spoke, and as Mr. Eyre struck a light he saw his first-born, standing at a few paces distance, clutching something white and shadowy to his boyish breast.

A sudden thrill told Mr. Eyre that this was Madcap's baby, the child of whom he had never even thought till now; and as the wax-light died out in darkness he strode forward, and snatching that little bundle from Doune's arms, folded it within his cloak, and turned away.

But at a little distance he heard a stifled cry, and paused to listen—

'Mother! mother! you asked me to be kind to the baby, to take care of her; but father's taken her

away . . . . and Josephine doesn't mind when she cries . . . . I would like to *die* with you. . . .'

As Mr. Eyre lifted the little struggling body from its damp bed, for the first time he realized that the loss of his Madcap might be as irreparable an one to others as himself.

When he walked into the nursery, dripping with the November night-dews, and the two children nestled beneath his cloak, Josephine started up in fear; though when he had given them over to her, he departed without a word or look to that part of the house in which he had dwelt with Madcap.

But Josephine, giving back the babe into the arms of its affrighted nurse, who for hours had sought it, bade the woman guard it better in future, since the master of the house had chosen to recognise its existence; then, with a shuddering glance around, put up her hand to those magnificent plaits of hair which had imperceptibly increased in bulk during the past fortnight.

A superb crown of plaits on a woman's head could scarcely hide a visible secret, yet it was curious that even at night Josephine did not unfasten them, but at dawn, and with locked doors, rose to dress her hair for the day.

CHAPTER VII.

'And feel I, Death, no joy from thought of thee?'

AT half-past ten o'clock next morning (in a court so inconceivably crowded that more than one woman fainted, and several slight accidents occurred), there being no witnesses to be called on behalf of the prisoner, the judge proceeded to sum up the evidence at considerable length.

Having lain stress on the prisoner's evident wish to avoid being seen at the Red Hall on the night of the murder, he drew attention to the positive proof of her having entered Mrs. Eyre's room that the scrap of torn clothing afforded; to the fact of the blood-stained knife that had undoubtedly committed the crime being found in her possession; to her extraordinary silence (save for an involuntary cry of terror when confronted by the gardener), and her disappearance from the neighbourhood for the space of two days and nights.

The defence set up by her counsel he would characterize as an ingenious theory that there was, unfortunately, not one jot or tittle of evidence to support; as a sketch of what *might* have happened it was effective, but as the jury had to deal with facts, not guesses, the sooner they forgot that little bit of romance-reading the better.

The evidence of the tramp was another matter, and

indirectly in her favour, as it pointed to the existence of some hitherto unsuspected person, who had gained access to Mrs. Eyre's room that night; though it was inconceivable, if such were the case, that the prisoner should so immediately obtain possession of the instrument of the murder, and preserve so inflexible a silence as to the inhuman deed committed on a lady she professed to have deeply loved.

The jury must not permit themselves either to be influenced in her favour by the fact that she had for months resided in the village, and made no attempt to poison Mrs. Eyre's mind against her husband. Mr. Eyre had assured them that she had distinctly threatened to harm his wife on the very day of the murder; though motives of policy, and, doubtless, some regard for her reputation, had hitherto kept her silent, since she had all to lose, and nothing to gain, by declaring the truth.

The judge's summing-up lasted some twenty minutes longer, but was distinctly unfavourable to the prisoner; possibly because he saw that more than half of the jurymen were strongly prejudiced in her favour. At a quarter to twelve they retired, and the judge left his seat to read the morning papers, half hoping that Mr. Eyre might join him; for, as a man, his sympathy was entirely with his old friend, whom he did not consider more guilty than others, though decidedly more unfortunate.

But Mr. Eyre, in obedience to a scribbled note from

the Duchess, had gone round to where she sat, and, in the grasp of her hand, met the first cordial support he had known for days. The Duchess's heart had thrilled at the evidence of Mr. Eyre's positive hatred of the prisoner; he had not been so cold to *her*, and Madcap was dead.

The Duke received him coldly. Hester's behaviour in the dock had produced a profound impression on him, as on many others. He thought that in nobility she showed almost equally with Frank; and his whole soul went forth in admiration to the young fellow whose self-sacrifice, heroically persisted in to the last, had ensured Madcap's happiness to the very end.

Mr. Eyre conversed on different topics, asking some particulars as to the Duke's shooting, and inquiring of the Duchess what might be her plans for the winter.

She thought him very little altered by his loss, not knowing that strong excitement, and a certainty that Hester would be found guilty, and Madcap avenged, sustained him.

The first shock to this conviction came when the jury, at the end of half-an-hour, re-entered the court. The judge resumed his seat. Mr. Eyre unconsciously clenched his bare hand till blood sprang from the finger-nails, as the clerk put the usual question to the foreman of:

'Guilty, or not guilty?'

'We can't agree.'

'Then you may retire,' said the judge, 'and the prisoner be removed, and brought up again for sentence'—and angrily jerking his robes about him, he withdrew.

Mr. Eyre stood rigid, then, exclaiming, 'Dolts! fools!—they can *hesitate!*' left the Duchess without a word.

Meanwhile Frank, who had caught from Hester, in the very act of removal, a look impossible to be misunderstood, had left the court, and, after some difficulty, succeeded in obtaining an interview with her, limited to one quarter of an hour.

He found her walking swiftly to and fro, and was shocked at the haggardness of the face she turned upon him as he entered.

'They're hesitating!' she said; 'I didn't think they would—but they may bring me in guilty, and it's best to face it . . . . only it seems harder than I reckoned on . . . . and there's her baby up there, and no mother to tend it—and if her death lies at my door for the wicked words I spoke to *him* that day, I'd like to live, and work it out . . . . but I understand now why Janet was so ready and willing to die . . . . when one's blind tired, and got nothing worth waking up for, it's natural to want to sleep . . . . but I shall be wanted, and *she* would have wished me to stop. I think you guessed it,' she went on with a wan smile; 'how I meant to steal my idol, and take him from his mother, and now God has stolen him, and laid him in

her arms . . . . it was only for a little while she was left without him.'

'Hester!' he cried, 'why won't you speak; clear yourself, for God's sake, if you are innocent—tell all that you know of that fatal night!'

'*If* I am innocent? You stayed away, but I never thought you believed me guilty. When you've loved some one dearly, and had a misunderstanding with her . . . . and made it up again, and kissed one another . . . . could you find it in your heart to kill her?' said Hester, with quivering lips. 'I didn't mean to speak . . . . I'm just working it out—my wickedness in saying what I did to him . . . . she'd be alive now, maybe, but for that.'

'What did you say to him?' cried Frank, seizing her by the arm, a horrible fear born of her looks and words, turning him pale as ashes. She tore herself away, and fell face downwards on the low pallet upon which she and Janet, through so many miserable hours, had sat side by side.

'I can't speak,' she said at last: 'I broke my word to her once, but I'll never break the last vow I swore to her, that I'd never harm anything she loved; and I never will . . . . I'd rather die than tell even *him*, much less you, the truth about the murder.'

'Then you know?' he said, scarcely breathing as he looked at her.

'After all, it's best to die,' said Hester, in the same tone; '*she* won't torment me with questions . . . .

for she doesn't know—she never shall . . . .' her voice dropped. 'But there's Janet, she'll miss my letters . . . . and if the worst comes, you'll see that no one tells her. . . .'

Footsteps approached, the brief interview was nearly ended. As she sat erect and covered up her face, the door opened, and the turnkey appeared in the aperture.

It was the same man who had admitted Mr. Eyre to that interview with Janet that the condemned woman had demanded, and something familiar in the huddled up figure on the pallet, in Frank's expectant attitude as he turned away, smote the man's dull memory into life. He glanced back curiously at Hester as he locked the door upon her.

There was a terrible question in Frank's eyes when next they met those of his friend, to which Mr. Eyre did not respond.

'What is it, Frank?' he said; 'are you afraid these fools will take vengeance out of our hands after all? They daren't do it, or I'd move heaven and earth to reverse their decision. This hand,' he added, looking at it, 'it's clean yet, but I won't answer for its deeds if *she* lives, while Madcap is dead.'

The day wore on, drew to its close, and the jury did not return.

Locked into a small room, without fire, food or candle—not having tasted food since morning—they passed the weary hours in striving to convince one another.

Six were of one opinion, six of the opposite ; the former half-dozen being guided by the judge's summing-up, and a profound respect for Mr. Eyre, the latter six by a variety of opinions, that included detestation of Mr. Eyre's moral character, pity and admiration for the accused, a strong suspicion that Digges had been too lightly released, a dark conviction that Mr. Eyre was the murderer himself, and that it was he whom the tramp had seen in Synge Lane ; all these being reasons, supplemented by an emphatic one from the twelfth juror (who had lost a beloved wife in childbirth last year), that it was not murder at all, but one of those natural deaths to which women succumb by the thousand every year, with no great fuss or outcry over the bitterest tragedy that life can furnish.

Perhaps the argument of the last juror, though weakest in itself, produced most effect on the opposing six, who were all married men, and had more than once gone through the dread and peril of seeing a beloved life at stake.

By degrees, first one was won over to the merciful side, then another ; but the incorruptible one turned out to be a butcher, impervious alike to fear, cold and hunger, who, slapping his mighty thigh, declared that when facts are on your side, you don't need hysterics to convince people ; and for his part, he was not going to be taken in by a lawyer chap, who snivelled with one eye, and winked at one's greenness with the other.

Possibly when eleven men set themselves (at their very keenest, through hunger and cold) to persuade one man, and he a butcher, to whom eleven excellent customers are a matter of consideration, the result may be forecast; but it fell with the force of a thunderbolt on the Court, when at nine o'clock the jury returned.

As the judge entered, the prisoner appeared from the cells below, the clerk rose to ask if the jury were agreed, to which the foreman replied by a nervous but distinct

'Not guilty.'

A profound silence followed these words; then gradually a faint hum made itself audible through the court, that rapidly swelled to a swift, on-rolling wave of applause, that had reached its height when it was discovered that Mr. Eyre and Hester Clarke had simultaneously disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

'But it was even thou, my companion, my guide and mine old familiar friend . . . .'

THE prison doors were open; Hester might walk out of them at her will, and with some vague idea of rest beyond, she had turned, and groped her way out, instinct guiding her to the great door that gave egress to the courtyard.

She did not know that without was assembled a vast crowd that reflected the division of opinion within, one-half of them believing her guilty, though acquitted; the other, and rougher portion, to whom she had become the idol of the hour, being equally certain of her innocence.

A hoarse shout of welcome rent the air as she appeared in the doorway, and, dazed and trembling, gazed outward at the sea of faces upturned to her; and hesitating to plunge into it, did not perceive how Mr. Eyre himself stood behind her.

'My friends,' said Hester, and stretched out her two thin hands imploringly, 'I have dwelt among you . . . . and you have known me . . . . and that I am . . . . innocent of this crime.'

'Innocent!' said a terrible voice in her ear; and she shrank back to see Mr. Eyre, cloaked and spurred, standing beside her, his eye gathering wrath and coldness as he glanced contemptuously at the crowd before him.

As he spoke, a mingled storm of execration and welcome arose, and grew louder and louder as the two tides of popular feeling met with a rush and a roar, that boded mischief both to accuser and accused.

'Let me pass, my men,' said Mr. Eyre, as he pushed his way out; and some made way, but others came thronging about him with threatening looks; and he found himself pushed, hustled, tossed this way and

that, his strength a mere nothing against the solid weight of the masses around him.

It would be difficult to say who struck the first blow, or hurled the first missile, but in a few minutes the courtyard was turned into a writhing mass of infuriated men and women, who struck out indiscriminately; and it was from one of his own tenants that Mr. Eyre received a blow on the head that, at the time, he scarcely even noticed.

He reached his horse at last, mounted it, and rode slowly home. Frank found him, a quarter of an hour later, sitting in his wife's room. He was pulseless and cold, blood oozing from a fracture of the skull.

For a month Frank never left him; but on the first day that Mr. Eyre was able to ask a rational question, he inquired for his friend. He was told that Lord Lovel had set out an hour ago for abroad, and that his return was uncertain.

On Mr. Eyre asking if he had left no message, he was told there was none; but a few days later a sealed letter was placed in his hand. The handwriting was Frank's.

'God help you!' it ran. 'I know the truth. Do not attempt to follow me. I will never of my own free will look upon your face again.

'FRANK LOVEL.'

Mr. Eyre read this letter through and through, then

asked if Hester Clarke had left the village, and was told that she had done so on the day succeeding her acquittal. He then sent for Job, who came unwillingly, and denied all knowledge of his master's movements; and this was true enough, for Frank had left the place in a state bordering on madness, and with no idea of his future plans.

A week later, Mr. Eyre, having set his house in order and made all arrangements for a lengthened absence, departed from the Red Hall, no one knew whither; though as years passed, and neither of the men returned, it was conjectured that they were together, seeking, in a life of perpetual adventure, to escape the memory of the woman they had both so deeply loved.

But those who knew Mr. Eyre well said that his story was not half done, nor the tragedy of Madcap's death yet played out to its bitter end; and these waited, with a breathless expectancy that even time could not dull, for the lifting of the curtain upon the last scene.

And, meanwhile, two unconsidered, fresh young lives were growing up at the Red Hall; but there was no living soul to tell Mr. Eyre that, if he had laid one treasure beneath the sod, there existed for him other priceless ones above it.

THE END.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD AND LONDON.

Stirling, March 1890.

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS' CATALOGUE.

NOVELS AT TWO SHILLINGS.

AINSWORTH, W. H.
Boscobel.
Manchester Rebels.
Preston Fight.
(See pages 11, 20, 23.*)*

ARMSTRONG, F. C.
Two Midshipmen.
Medora.
War Hawk.
Young Commander.

BANIM, John.
Peep o' Day.
Smuggler.

BELL, M. M.
Deeds, Not Words.
Secret of a Life.

BELLEW, J. C. M.
Blount Tempest.

BLACK, Robert.
Love or Lucre.

CARLETON, William.
Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry. 1st series.
——— 2nd series.

CHAMIER, Captain.
Life of a Sailor.
Ben Brace.
Tom Bowling.
Jack Adams.

COLOMB, Colonel.
Hearths and Watchfires.

COCKTON, Henry.
Valentine Vox.
Stanley Thorn.

COOPER, J. Fenimore.
Lionel Lincoln.
Borderers.
Waterwitch.
Deerslayer.
Heidenmauer.
Miles Wallingford.
Afloat and Ashore. (Sequel to Miles Wallingford.)
Bravo.
Headsman.
Wyandotte.

The following in double columns, 2s. each Vol. containing 4 Novels.

1. Spy — Pilot — Homeward Bound—Eve Effingham.
2. Pioneers — Mohicans — Prairie—Pathfinder.
3. Red Rover—Two Admirals —Miles Wallingford — Afloat and Ashore.
4. Borderers — Wyandotte — Mark's Reef—Satanstoe.
5. Lionel Lincoln — Oak Openings—Ned Myers — Precaution.
6. Deerslayer — Headsman— Waterwitch — Heidenmauer.
7. Bravo—Sea Lions—Jack Tier—Mercedes.

(See pages 11, 16, 21.*)*

CROLY, Dr.
Salathiel.

CROWE, Catherine.
Night Side of Nature.
Susan Hopley.
Linny Lockwood.

NOVELS AT TWO SHILLINGS, *continued.*

CUMMINS, M. S.
Lamplighter.
Mabel Vaughan.

CUPPLES, Captain.
Green Hand.
Two Frigates.

DICKENS, Charles.
Sketches by Boz.
Oliver Twist.
Pickwick Papers.
Nicholas Nickleby.
Martin Chuzzlewit.

DICKENS, Charles, Edited by.
Life of Grimaldi, the Clown. Illustrated by Cruikshank.

DUMAS, Alexandre.
Half Brothers.
Marguerite de Valois.
Mohicans of Paris.
(See pages 12, 19.)

EDGEWORTH, Maria.
Helen.

EDWARDS, Amelia B.
Ladder of Life.
My Brother's Wife.
Half a Million of Money.

EDWARDS, Mrs.
Miss Forrester.

FERRIER, Miss.
Marriage.
Inheritance.
Destiny.

FIELDING, Henry.
Tom Jones.
Joseph Andrews.
Amelia.

FITTIS, Robert.
Gilderoy.

GERSTAECKER, F.
A Wife to Order.
Two Convicts.
Feathered Arrow.
Each for Himself.
(See page 12.)

GLEIG, G. R.
Light Dragoon.
Chelsea Veterans.
Hussar.

GODWIN, William.
Caleb Williams.

GORE, Mrs.
Money Lender.
Pin Money.
Dowager.

GRANT, James.
Romance of War; or, The Highlanders in Spain.
Aide-de-Camp.
Scottish Cavalier: the Revolution of 1688.
Bothwell: the Days of Mary Queen of Scots.
Jane Seton: A Scottish Historical Romance of James V.
Philip Rollo.
Legends of the Black Watch (42nd Regiment).
Mary of Lorraine.
Oliver Ellis; or, The 21st Fusiliers.
Lucy Arden; or, Hollywood Hall.
Frank Hilton; or, The Queen's Own.
Yellow Frigate.
Harry Ogilvie; or, The Black Dragoons.
Arthur Blane; or, The 100 Cuirassiers.
Laura Everingham; or, The Highlanders of Glenora.

NOVELS AT TWO SHILLINGS, *continued.*

GRANT, James, continued.
Captain of the Guard; or, The Times of James II.
Letty Hyde's Lovers: A Tale of the Household Brigade.
Cavaliers of Fortune.
Second to None; or, The Scots Greys.
Constable of France.
Phantom Regiment.
King's Own Borderers; or, The 25th Regiment.
White Cockade.
Dick Rodney: Adventures of an Eton Boy.
First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny.
The Girl He Married: Scenes in the Life of a Scotch Laird.
Lady Wedderburn's Wish: A Story of the Crimean War.
Jack Manly: His Adventures by Sea and Land.
Only an Ensign: The Retreat from Cabul.
Adventures of Rob Roy.
Under the Red Dragon.
Queen's Cadet, & other Tales.
Shall I Win Her.
Fairer than a Fairy.
The Secret Dispatch.
One of the Six Hundred.
Morley Ashton: A Story of the Sea.
Did She Love Him?
The Ross-shire Buffs.
Six Years Ago.
Vere of Ours.
Lord Hermitage.
Royal Regiment.

"GUY LIVINGSTONE," Author of.
Guy Livingstone.
Barren Honour.
Maurice Dering.
Brakespeare.
Anteros.
Breaking a Butterfly.
Sans Merci.
Sword and Gown.

HALIBURTON, Judge.
Sam Slick, the Clockmaker.
The Attaché.
Letter Bag of Great Western.

HANNAY, James.
Singleton Fontenoy.

HERING, Jeanie.
Through the Mist.

HOOK, Theodore.
Peregrine Bunce.
Cousin Geoffry.
Gilbert Gurney.
Parson's Daughter.
All in the Wrong.
Widow and the Marquess.
Gurney Married.
Jack Brag.
Maxwell.
Man of Many Friends.
Passion and Principle.
Merton.
Gervase Skinner.
Cousin William.
Fathers and Sons.

HUGO, Victor.
Les Misérables.

JAMES, G. P. R.
Brigand.
Morley Ernstein.
Darnley.
Richelieu.
Gipsy.
Arabella Stuart.
Woodman.
Agincourt.
Russell.
King's Highway.
Castle of Ehrenstein.
Stepmother.

NOVELS AT TWO SHILLINGS, *continued.*

JAMES, G. P. R., continued.
Forest Days.
Huguenot.
Man at Arms.
A Whim and its Consequences.
Henry Masterton.
Convict.
Mary of Burgundy.
Gowrie.
Delaware.
Henry of Guise.
Robber.
One in a Thousand.
Smuggler.
De L'Orme.
Heidelberg.
False Heir.
Castleneau.
Forgery.
Gentleman of the Old School.
Philip Augustus.
Black Eagle.
Old Dominion.
Beauchamp.
Arrah Neil.
My Aunt Pontypool.

JEPHSON, R. Mounteney.
Tom Bulkeley of Lissington.
The Girl He Left behind Him.

KINGSLEY, Henry.
Stretton.
Old Margaret.
The Harveys.
Hornby Mills.

KINGSTON, W. H. G.
Pirate of the Mediterranean.

L. E. L.
Francesca Carrara.

LANG, John.
The Ex-Wife.
Will He Marry Her?

LEVER, Charles.
Arthur O'Leary.
Con Cregan.
Horace Templeton.
(See page 19.)

LE FANU, Sheridan.
Torlogh O'Brien.

LONG, Lady Catherine.
First Lieutenant's Story.
Sir Roland Ashton.

LOVER, Samuel.
Rory O'More.
Handy Andy.

LYTTON, Right Hon. Lord.
Pelham.
Paul Clifford.
Eugene Aram.
Last Days of Pompeii.
Rienzi.
Leila, and Pilgrims of the Rhine.
Last of the Barons.
Ernest Maltravers.
Alice. (Sequel to Ernest Maltravers.)
Night and Morning.
Godolphin.
Disowned.
Devereux.
The Caxtons.
My Novel. 2 vols.
Lucretia.
Harold.
Zanoni.
What will He Do with It? 2 vols.
A Strange Story.
Pausanias.
The Coming Race.
Kenelm Chillingly.
The Parisians. 2 vols.
Falkland and Zicci.
(See pages 12, 14, 17, 21.)

NOVELS AT TWO SHILLINGS, *continued.*

MARRYAT, Captain.
Jacob Faithful.
Japhet in Search of a Father.
King's Own.
Midshipman Easy.
Newton Forster.
Pacha of Many Tales.
Rattlin the Reefer.
Poacher.
Phantom Ship.
Dog Fiend.
Percival Keene.
Frank Mildmay.
Peter Simple.

2s. each Volume, containing 4 Novels.

1. King's Own—Frank Mildmay—Newton Forster—Peter Simple.
2. Pacha of Many Tales—Jacob Faithful—Midshipman Easy—Japhet.
3. Phantom Ship—Dog Fiend—OllaPodrida—Poacher.
4. Percival Keene—Monsieur Violet—Rattlin—Valerie.

(See pages 13, 16, 18.)

MARTINEAU, Harriet.
The Hour and the Man.

MAXWELL, W. H.
Stories of Waterloo.
Bryan O'Lynn; or, Luck's Everything.
Captain Blake.
The Bivouac.
Hector O'Halloran.
Captain O'Sullivan.
Stories of the Peninsular War.
Flood and Field. [Highlands.
Sports and Adventures in the
Wild Sports in the West.

MAYHEW, Brothers.
The Greatest Plague of Life. (Cruikshank's Plates.)
Whom to Marry. (Cruikshank's Plates.)

MAYO, W. S.
Kaloolah.

MILLER, Thomas.
Gideon Giles, the Roper.

MORIER, Captain.
Hajji Baba in Ispahan.

MURRAY, Hon. Sir Charles.
Prairie Bird.

NEALE, Captain.
Lost Ship.
Captain's Wife.
Pride of the Mess.
Will Watch.
Cavendish.
Flying Dutchman.
Gentleman Jack.

NORTON, Hon. Mrs.
Stuart of Dunleath.

OLD CALABAR.
Won in a Canter.

OLD SAILOR.
Land and Sea Tales.

OLIPHANT, Mrs.
At His Gates.

PALISSER, John.
Solitary Hunter.

PARDOE, Miss.
City of the Sultan.

PORTER, Jane.
Scottish Chiefs.
Thaddeus of Warsaw.

PAYN, J.
Murphy's Master.
A Perfect Treasure.
Saved by a Woman.

RAFTER, Captain.
The Rifleman.

NOVELS AT TWO SHILLINGS, *continued.*

RADCLIFFE, Ann.
Three Novels in One Vol., price 2s.
Romance of the Forest.
The Italian.
Mysteries of Udolpho (2 parts).

REACH, Angus B.
Clement Lorimer.
Leonard Lindsay.

REID, Mayne.
Afloat in the Forest.
Boy Slaves.
Cliff Climbers.
Fatal Cord.
Giraffe Hunters.
Guerilla Chief.
Half Blood ; or, Oceola.
Headless Horseman.
Hunters' Feast.
Lost Lenore.
Maroon.
Ocean Waifs.
Rifle Rangers.
Scalp Hunters.
Tiger Hunter.
White Chief.
White Gauntlet.
White Squaw.
Wild Huntress.
Wood Rangers.

RITCHIE.
Robber of the Rhine.

ROSS, Charles H.
Pretty Widow.

REELSTAB.
Polish Lancer.

RUSSELL, Dr. W. H.
Adventures of Dr. Brady.

RUSSELL, W.
Romance of Military Life.

SANDERS, Capt. Patten.
Black and Gold : A Tale of Circassia.

SCOTT, Sir Walter.
Abbot.
Anne of Geierstein.
Antiquary.
Betrothed ; Highland Widow.
Black Dwarf; Legend of Montrose.
Bride of Lammermoor.
Count Robert of Paris.
Fair Maid of Perth.
Fortunes of Nigel.
Guy Mannering.
Heart of Midlothian.
Ivanhoe.
Kenilworth.
Monastery.
Old Mortality.
Peveril of the Peak.
Pirate.
Quentin Durward.
Red Gauntlet.
Rob Roy.
St. Ronan's Well.
Surgeon's Daughter.
Talisman ; Two Drovers.
Waverley.
Woodstock.

2s. each Volume, containing 4 Novels.

1. Waverley — Monastery — Kenilworth—Rob Roy.
2. Pirate — Ivanhoe — Fortunes of Nigel — Old Mortality.
3. Guy Mannering—Bride of Lammermoor—Heart of Midlothian—Antiquary.
4. Peveril of the Peak — Quentin Durward — St. Ronan's Well.—Abbot.

NOVELS AT TWO SHILLINGS, *continued.*

SCOTT, Sir Walter, continued.
5. Black Dwarf—Woodstock —Anne of Geierstein—Betrothed.
6. Fair Maid of Perth—Surgeon's Daughter—Talisman — Count Robert of Paris — Redgauntlet. 2*s.* 6*d.*

SCOTT, Lady.
Henpecked Husband.

SCOTT, Michael.
Cruise of the Midge.
Tom Cringle's Log.

SMITH, Albert.
Marchioness of Brinvilliers.
Adventures of Mr. Ledbury.
Scattergood Family.
Christopher Tadpole.
Pottleton Legacy.

SMOLLETT, Tobias.
Roderick Random.
Humphrey Clinker.
Peregrine Pickle.

STRETTON, Hesba.
The Clives of Burcot.

ST. JOHN.
Flowers of the Forest.

SUE, Eugene.
Mysteries of Paris.
Wandering Jew.

THOMAS, Annie.
Sir Victor's Choice.
False Colours.
Dower House.
Cross of Honour.

TROLLOPE, Anthony.
The Golden Lion of Granpère.

TROLLOPE, Mrs.
Petticoat Government.
One Fault.
Widow Barnaby.
Widow Married.
The Ward.
Love and Jealousy.

VERNE, Jules.
Adventures of Captain Hatteras.
Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea.
Five Weeks in a Balloon, and a Journey to the Centre of the Earth.

WARD, Mrs.
Jasper Lyle: A Tale of South Africa.

WARNEFORD, Lieut.
Tales of the Coast-Guard.

WETHERELL, Miss.
Old Helmet.
Ellen Montgomery's Bookshelf.
Melbourne House.
Two School Girls.
Wide, Wide World.
Queechy.
Hope's Little Hand; or, The Hills of the Shatemuc.

WHITEFRIARS, Author of.
Whitefriars.
Whitehall.
Cæsar Borgia.
Owen Tudor.
Maid of Orleans.
Westminster Abbey.
Madeleine Graham.
Gold Worshippers.
Armourer's Daughter.

NOVELS AT TWO SHILLINGS, *continued.*

WHYTE-MELVILLE, Major.

Uncle John.
The White Rose.
Cerise: A Tale of the Last Century.
Brookes of Bridlemere.
"Bones and I;" or, The Skeleton at Home.
"M. or N?" Similia Similibus Curantur.
Contraband; or, A Losing Hazard.
Sarchedon: A Legend of the Great Queen.
Market Harborough; or, How Mr. Sawyer went to the Shires.
Songs and Verses.
Satanella: A Story of Punchestown.
The True Cross: A Legend of the Church.
Katerfelto: A Story of Exmoor.
Sister Louise; or, A Story of a Woman's Repentance.
Rosine.

YATES, Edmund.

Black Sheep.
Broken to Harness.
Business or Pleasure.
Dr. Wainwright's Patients.
Impending Sword.
Kissing the Rod.
Nobody's Fortune.
A Righted Wrong.
Rock Ahead.
Running the Gauntlet.
Silent Witness.
Two by Tricks.
A Waiting Race.
Wrecked in Port.
Yellow Flag.

ANONYMOUS.

Adventures of a Strolling Player.
Bashful Irishman.
The Hazelhurst Mystery.
Love Stories of English Watering Places.
Recommended to Mercy.
Vidocq, the French Police Spy.
Jennie of the Prince's.
Won.
My Love She's but a Lassie Yet.
Queenie.
A Jewel of a Girl.

ROUTLEDGE'S POPULAR NOVELS.

Well bound in cloth, full gilt back, black printing on the side, and cut edges, price 1s. 6d. each.

MARRYAT, Captain. 1s. 6d.

Peter Simple.
King's Own.
Midshipman Easy.
Rattlin the Reefer.
Pacha of Many Tales.
Newton Forster.
Jacob Faithful.
Dog Fiend.
Japhet in Search of a Father.
Poacher.
Phantom Ship.
Percival Keene.
Valerie.
Frank Mildmay.
Olla Podrida.
Monsieur Violet.
Pirate and Three Cutters.

AINSWORTH, W. H. 1s. 6d.

Windsor Castle.
Tower of London.
Miser's Daughter.
Old St. Paul's.
Crichton.
Guy Fawkes.
Spendthrift.
James the Second.
Star Chamber.
Flitch of Bacon.
Lancashire Witches.
Mervyn Clitheroe.
Ovingdean Grange.
St. James's.
Auriol.
Rookwood.
Jack Sheppard.

COOPER, J. Fenimore. 1s. 6d.

Lionel Lincoln.
Deerslayer.
Waterwitch.
Two Admirals.
Red Rover.
Afloat and Ashore.
Wyandotte.
Headsman.
Homeward Bound.
Sea Lions.
Ned Myers.
Last of the Mohicans.
Spy.
Pilot.

The Complete Set of 26 *Vols.*, £1 19s.

HAWTHORNE, Nath.

The Scarlet Letter.
House of the Seven Gables.
Mosses from an Old Manse.

DUMAS, Alexandre.

For the order of the Sequels, see page 12.

Dr. Basilius.
Twin Captains.
Captain Paul.
Memoirs of a Physician, 2 vols.
Two Dianas.
Conspirators.
Queen's Necklace.
Page of the Duke of Savoy.
Regent's Daughter.
Taking of the Bastile, 2 vols.
Countess de Charny.
Chevalier de Maison Rouge.
Monte Cristo, 2 vols.
Nanon.
Chicot the Jester.
Ascanio.
Three Musketeers.
Twenty Years After.
Black Tulip.
Forty-five Guardsmen.
Isabel of Bavaria.
Beau Tancrede.
Pauline.
Catherine Blum.
Ingenue.
Russian Gipsy.
Watchmaker.

POPULAR NOVELS AT 1/6, *continued.*

CARLETON, William.

Emigrants.
Jane Sinclair.
Clarionet.
Fardarougha.
Tithe Proctor.

GRIFFIN, Gerald.

Colleen Bawn.
Munster Festivals.
The Rivals.

In limp cloth, gilt, **One Shilling** each.

Uncle Tom's Cabin.
Robinson Crusoe.
Vicar of Wakefield.
Essays of Elia.
Gulliver's Travels.
Irving's Sketch Book.
Lamplighter.

AMERICAN LIBRARY.

A Series of the most Popular American Works, in fancy covers, each **One Shilling.**

BURNETT, Mrs. Hodgson.

The Tide on the Moaning Bar.
That Lass o' Lowrie's. 1*s.*
Dolly. 1*s.*
Pretty Polly Pemberton. 1*s.*
Kathleen. 1*s.*
Our Neighbour Opposite. 1*s.*
Miss Crespigny. 1*s.*
Lindsay's Luck. 1*s.*

ADELER, Max.

Out of the Hurly-Burly. 1*s.*
Elbow Room. 1*s.*

ADAMS, Charles F.

Leedle Yawcob Strauss. 1*s.*

ANONYMOUS.

Some Other Babies, very like Helen's, only more so. 1*s.*
Artemus Ward: His Book, his Travels. 1*s.*
The Man who was Not a Colonel. 1*s.*
Dot and Dime, Two Characters in Ebony. 1*s.*
The Four Irrepressibles. 1*s.*
My Mother-in-Law. 1*s.*
That Wife of Mine. 1*s.*
That Husband of Mine. 1*s.*

TWAIN, Mark.

Celebrated Jumping Frog. Author's edition, with a Copyright Poem. 1*s.*
Roughing It (copyright). 1*s.*
Innocents at Home (copyright). 1*s.*
Mark Twain's Curious Dream (copyright). 1*s.*
Innocents Abroad. 1*s.*
New Pilgrim's Progress. 1*s.*
Information Wanted, and other Sketches. 1*s.*
Roughing It, and Innocents at Home. 2*s.*
Sketches. 2*s.*
Innocents Abroad, and New Pilgrim's Progress. 2*s.*
Celebrated Jumping Frog, and Curious Dream. 2*s.*
Gilded Age, a Novel, by Mark Twain & C. D. Warner. 2*s.*

"Messrs. GEORGE ROUTLEDGE and SONS are my only authorized London publishers. (Signed) MARK TWAIN."

AMERICAN LIBRARY, *continued.*

HARTE, Bret.
- Luck of Roaring Camp, with Preface by Tom Hood. 1*s.*
- Bret Harte's Poems (complete). 1*s.*
- Mrs. Skaggs's Husbands. 1*s.*
- Condensed Novels. 1*s.*
- An Episode of Fiddletown. 1*s.*
- The Fool of Five Forks. 1*s.*
- Wan Lee, the Pagan. 1*s.*
- Thankful Blossom. 1*s.*
- My Friend the Tramp. 1*s.*
- Story of a Mine. 1*s.*
- The Man on the Beach.
- Jinny.
- Prose and Poetry. 2*s.*
- Condensed Novels, and Mrs. Skaggs's Husbands. 2*s.*

LOWELL, James R.
- Biglow Papers, 1st and 2nd Series. 1*s.*

MILLER, Joaquin.
- First Families of the Sierras. 1*s.*

ALDRICH, T. B.
- Prudence Palfrey. 1*s.*
- Marjorie Daw. 2*s.* and 5*s.*
- The Cloth of Gold. 1*s.* and 3*s.* 6*d.*
- Queen of Sheba. 1*s.*
- Flower and Thorn. 3*s.* 6*d.*
- Baby Bell (Illustrated). 3*s.* 6*d.*

DANBURY NEWSMAN.
- Life in Danbury. 1*s.*
- Mr. Miggs of Danbury. 2*s.*

HABBERTON, John.
- Helen's Babies. 1*s.*
- Barton Experiment. 1*s.*
- Jericho Road. 1*s.*
- Other People's Children. 1*s.*
- Helen's Babies, and Other People's Children, in 1 vol. 2*s.*
- Scripture Club of Valley Rest. 1*s.*
- Some Folks. 2*s.*
- Cruise of the *Sam Weller*. 1*s.*

EGGLESTON, E.
- Hoosier Schoolmaster. 1*s.*
- End of the World. 1*s.*
- Mystery of Metropolisville. 1*s.*
- Circuit Rider. 2*s.*

HOLMES, O. Wendell.
- Poet at the Breakfast Table. 1*s.* and 2*s.*
- Autocrat at the Breakfast Table. 1*s.*
- Elsie Venner. 2*s.*

HOLLAND, Dr.
- Arthur Bonnicastle. 2*s.*

VICTOR, Mrs.
- Maum Guinea. 1*s.*

E. S. PHELPS.
- The Story of Avis. 2*s.*

BILLINGS, Josh.
- Wit and Humour. 2*s.*

NASBY, Petroleum V.
- Eastern Fruit on Western Dishes. 1*s.*

RAILWAY LIBRARY

NEW VOLUMES.

TWO SHILLINGS EACH, FANCY BOARDS.

THE CAMERONIANS.
By JAMES GRANT.

STORY OF A SIN.
By HELEN MATHERS.

BLAIR ATHOL.
By "BLINKHOOLIE."

TOM SINGLETON,
DRAGOON and DRAMATIST.

THE SCOTS' BRIGADE.
By JAMES GRANT.

TWO PRETTY GIRLS.
By MARY A. LEWIS.

VIOLET JERMYN.
By JAMES GRANT.

BEATEN AT THE POST.

LONDON: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SON,
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL.